

# American Film

Magazine of the  
Film and Television Arts

December 1980  
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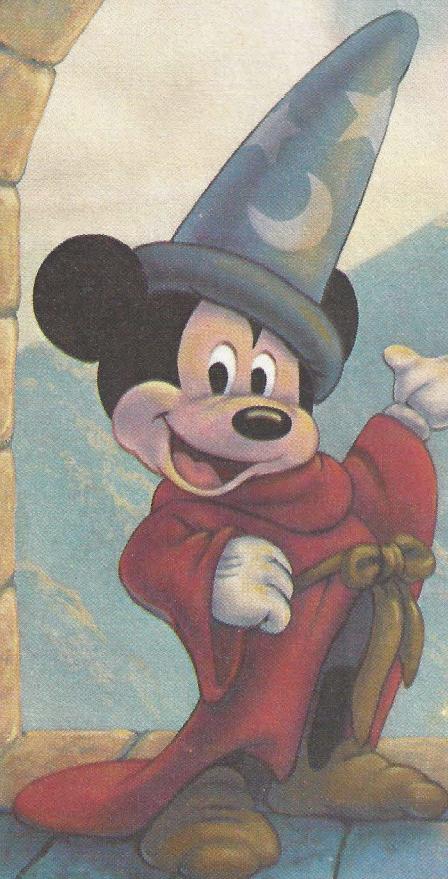
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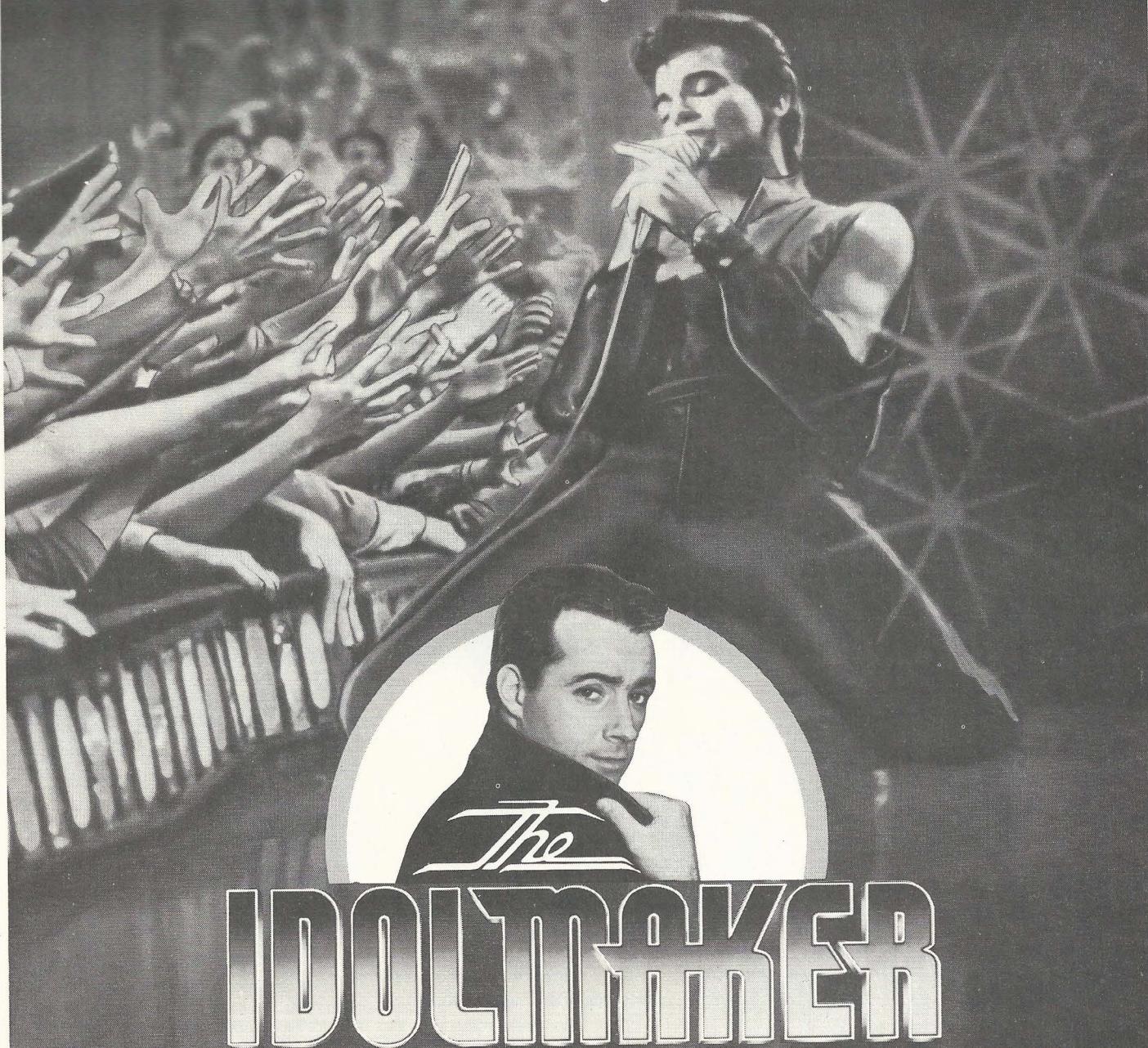
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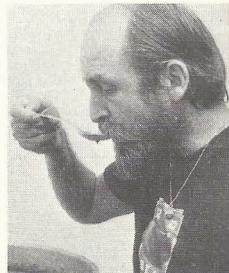
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Cover: Robin Williams and Shelley Duvall in *Popeye*. (Photo by Paul Ronald. Courtesy, Paramount Pictures.)

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The American Film Institute is an independent, nonprofit organization serving the public interest, established in 1967 by the National Endowment for the Arts to advance the art of film and television in the United States. The Institute preserves films, operates an advanced conservatory for filmmakers, gives assistance to new American filmmakers through grants and internships, provides guidance to film teachers and educators, publishes film books, periodicals, and reference works, supports basic research, and operates a national film repertory exhibition program.

**T**he story took up a large chunk of my life," says Jon S. Denny, referring to his colorful profile, in this issue, on the screenwriter and late-night television wit Buck Henry. Denny is only slightly exaggerating. He was, in fact, at work on the story—on and off—for more than a year. That may seem like a good deal of time to spend stalking a subject, but then Buck Henry required more than average perseverance.

For one thing, he simply does not like being interviewed. It's not shyness, but caution. An interview, he told Denny, is "just one more weapon for those who are out to get you." Denny says he was not smiling. For another thing, Buck Henry has been directing a movie during the past year. It's a political satire called *First Family*, it marks Henry's debut as a director (not counting co-directing credit on *Heaven Can Wait*), and it opens for the holidays. "Buck had a rule," Denny recalls, "and it was a steadfast rule—no interviews during filming." In fact, he closed the set.

But Denny, who is young and industrious, persevered with good humor. When Buck Henry finally agreed to talk—after Denny had done his homework by interviewing a number of Henry's friends and associates—the talk went on over a period of days. At the end of the last, long session, Denny recalls, Henry took his briefcase, mounted his bicycle outside his office door at Warner Bros., and pedaled off into the sunlight, free at last. Some weeks later, Denny returned to the Warners lot and saw Buck Henry passing by with some associates. Henry offered no greeting. Instead, he pointed Denny out and said, in his precise, deadpan voice, "Eleven hours of torture."

**H**undreds of books on film and television are published each year. Some are good, many are not. The special holiday book section in this issue provides timely help for the perplexed book buyer searching for the good ones. Two articles offer guidance in choosing the essential books—the no-library-can-be-without books—on film and on television. And for the reader in search of contemporary reading, there's a guide to the worthwhile books on film and television published during 1980. The list is annotated and arranged by categories.

The job of assembling the guide fell to Senior Editor Thomas Wiener. Assisted by Kathy Davis, Wiener first surveyed the entire range of film and television books published during the year. They included titles from trade publishers, university presses, and small, specialized houses. Then, drawing on his own wide reading, on reviews, and on sources inside and outside the AFI, Wiener drew up a preliminary list. It numbered an overgenerous two hundred books. Finally, after some rigorous winnowing, the list was reduced to its present length, far shorter but still accommodating enough books for a variety of tastes.

Happy browsing, and from the staff of *American Film*, happy holidays.

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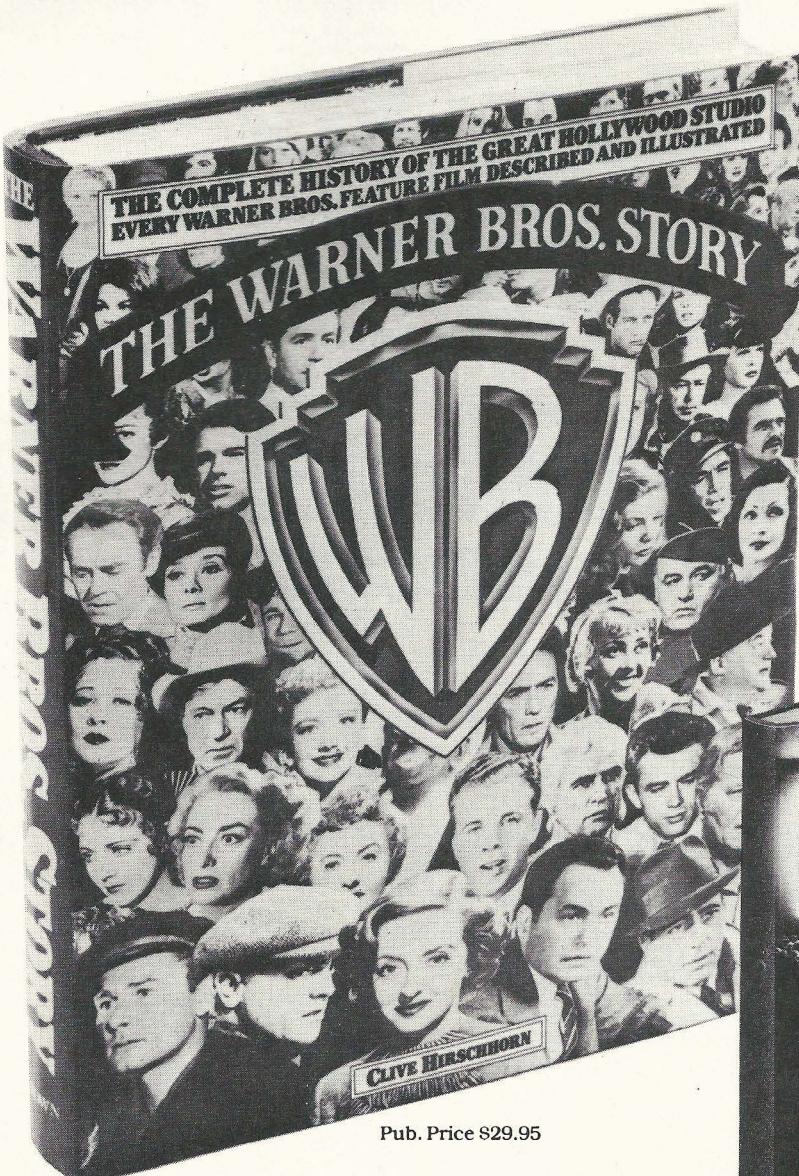
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If your fondest memories take you back to Saturday afternoon showdowns with Lash La Rue or John Wayne, if your first love was Alice Faye or Clark Gable, if you delight in performing your own repertoire of immortal one-liners or obscure behind-the-screen facts, we've got a treat for you!

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# Letters

## Animated Animators

The article "All That Jazz . . . Swing . . . Pop . . . and Rock" in the July-August issue was a new link in the chain of bad articles written about animation in recent years. Animation appears to be the only art form where one needs no knowledge of the subject to write about it.

Real animators and the public must continually submit to articles that refer to people who do not animate as "animators," and films that are not animated as "animated films." Not content with this, your article even dubbed Ralph Bakshi "animator *extraordinaire*."

Ralph Bakshi is a *producer*. He is a successful one. He has produced animated films in the past, and directed them. They are not now, nor have they been since *Wizards*, animated films.

An animator is a person who creates motion from previously inanimate objects. These can be pieces of paper, or colors, or clay, or drawings—anything that cannot be said to be moving under its own power. Real people can be posed and shot single frame. This is called pixillation. Pixillation is considered animation because the performers never really are moving until the image is projected.

There is another type of filmmaking. It consists of tracing live-action film onto cels, and keeping the action "realistic." It is called rotoscoping and was invented by the Fleischer studios about 1916. Rotoscoping is not animation by the previous definition, as there is no animation skill needed to trace a photograph.

It is hoped that the press will eventually come to respect the differences between various types of filmmaking enough to assign the same journalistic standards to articles on animation that they have to those on live action.

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New York, New York*

## Ulterior Motive

Morris Dickstein's article on horror films ("The Aesthetics of Fright," September) is an interesting analysis of our reasons for enjoying films of terror, but he seems to overlook the most obvious explanation.

Most admissions to movies are by young people, a great many of whom are young men with their dates. Our culture provides very few opportunities for males to display their "typical" macho characteristics, but at the horror film, while the "weaker sex" cringes, screams, and turns from the screen,

her "protector" is there to laugh at the danger and hold her.

Despite the feminist revolution, traditional male and female roles are still sought by most people—especially the young who are desperately searching for identity and need reinforcement. In spite of Mr. Dickstein's psychological analysis (which I'm sure has much truth in it), people simply go to horror films so boys can be "masculine" and girls can be "feminine." Where else is it as simple as in the darkened theater?

*Gerald Schiller  
Los Angeles, California*

## Paperback Writer

I deeply appreciate Michael Wood's graceful and gentle review of my book *Moving Places* (October), qualms included. But I regret one omission. The book is available in paper—from Harper Colophon Books, for \$5.95—as well as in hardcover.

*Jonathan Rosenbaum  
Hoboken, New Jersey*

## The Wrong Man

Rex McGee did a brilliant job of sorting out the tangled threads of the story behind *Heaven's Gate* ("Michael Cimino's Way West," October). But if Sam Waterston ever sees his picture on page 38, he'll probably wonder if he really did spend all those weeks in Kalispell. Truth is, that's not Waterston (or Frank Canton) at all. Tell your photo editor to clean his glasses and take another look.

*V. Power  
Santa Barbara, California*

**Editors' Note:** You're right. That's an extra whose resemblance to the villainous character Waterston played fooled all of us.

## My Dad, the "Czar"

I've read Charles Champlin's "What Will H. Hays Begat" in the October issue about the movies' Production Code and related subjects, including my dad's part in those. I found it interesting and refreshingly accurate.

Of course, the article's title and the drawing of Will Hays holding the decalogue are misleading—the idea of self-censorship wasn't something he "begat," and he wasn't remotely sanctimonious—but the skillful digest of the chronology and stimuli of developments is rare in its adherence to the facts.

If I may presume to say so, the only thing Mr. Champlin might have added which I think is interesting is that the press got the "Movie Czar" business from its having previously dubbed baseball's Judge Landis the "Baseball Czar," as I recall the story.

*Will H. Hays, Jr.  
Crawfordsville, Indiana*

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## A personal message to you from Neil Simon

Dear Reader,

As the author of many different plays -- including The Odd Couple, Barefoot in the Park, and Chapter Two -- I've gained the reputation of being a fairly prolific writer. But I've never written a letter like this before.

I do so now to tell you about the remarkable job Save the Children is doing for impoverished youngsters and their families around the world.

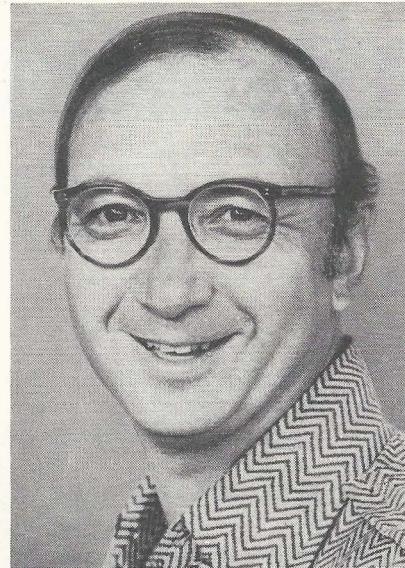
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Thank you.

*Neil Simon*



AF 12/0

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## The Razor's Edge

Ernest Lehman

I sincerely hope that by the time you read this, the controversy over *Dressed To Kill* will have died down (and please *don't* read this if you haven't seen the picture yet). I mean, how long can irate housewives and irate pressure groups and assorted crackpots of the Right and the Left go on yammering in public and writing letters to the editors and sounding off on talk shows about how furious they are with critics and audiences for liking Brian De Palma's film so much? Each rave review produces new raving maniacs. Each successful week at the ticket wickets brings forth more froth.

This group violently deplores the violence. That group of bleeding hearts deplores the blood. This group puts a bookmark in its *Gay Talese* and cries out against the overt sexuality. That group snuffs out the roach and claims the picture is antipsychiatry. Transsexuals claim they are misrepresented. Transvestites demand equal spelling. The United Auto Workers insist they make backseats for *sitting*. Procter & Gamble gets in a lather over the misuse of *soap*. Schick and Remington charge discrimination against electric razors. Gillette protests the failure to stress the *safety* razor. . . .

Ridiculous. All of it.

Except for the husband's brief stint before the bathroom mirror in the opening scene, *Dressed To Kill* has nothing whatsoever to do with shaving. There is not one foot of film in which Angie Dickinson shaves or gets shaved. In fact, there is visible evidence in the film that she *doesn't* shave. And completely overlooked by everyone apparently is the fact that the writer-director of the film has an outstanding beard himself. If anybody at all connected with this picture could be considered a candidate for getting a shave, it would have to be Mr. De Palma.

One angry moviegoer writing in to one of the national magazines, or maybe it was to the *Boston Phoenix*, denounced the picture as a rip-off of *Psycho*, completely ignoring the

**One angry moviegoer denounced *Dressed To Kill* as a rip-off of *Psycho*, ignoring the fact that *Psycho* is a black-and-white film while *Dressed To Kill* is in red.**

fact that *Psycho* is a black-and-white film while *Dressed To Kill* is in red. Are filmmakers from here on in going to be forced to eliminate all shower scenes from their pictures to avoid charges of ripping off *Psycho*? Are we moviegoers faced with nothing to look forward to but a succession of dirty pictures with dirty actresses in them? I hope not.

As for psychiatry and psychiatrists, they need no defense from *me*. They can listen for themselves. But the charge that *Dressed To Kill* will cause needy neurotics to live with their problems rather than die with their treatment is like saying that *Gone With the Wind* caused the people of Atlanta to catch cold and give up smoking because they were afraid to light a match. Movies simply do not have that direct, one-to-one

impact on their audiences, much as filmmakers would like to believe otherwise.

Any neurotic who sees *Dressed To Kill*—particularly a woman—will probably be sane enough to know that there are all kinds of ways of ensuring one's safety during treatment by a male analyst. The easiest method is simply not to tell him anything (though that's sort of beating him at his own game, and is ultimately expensive and self-defeating). More practical would be to move his office furniture around so that you can always keep an eye on him, or make *him* lie on the couch while *you* sit up. If he's a straight, decent, safe kind of guy, he surely isn't going to object to being *comfortable*, is he?

Yes, you say, but suppose he is fiendishly clever at concealing his secret proclivities, capable even of fooling his own psychiatrist? Well, it's up to *you*, the potential analysand, to unearth these facts beforehand. You don't just look up a man's medical background, his training. You ask him what his favorite perfume is; you steal a peek into his wardrobe closet; you see if his labels read Brooks Brothers, Carroll and Company, Mr. Guy, or Henri Bendel, Bergdorf Goodman, Rive Gauche. What I mean is, if you have real emotional problems and need help, make sure it is *you* who flips your lid, *you* who wigs out, not him.

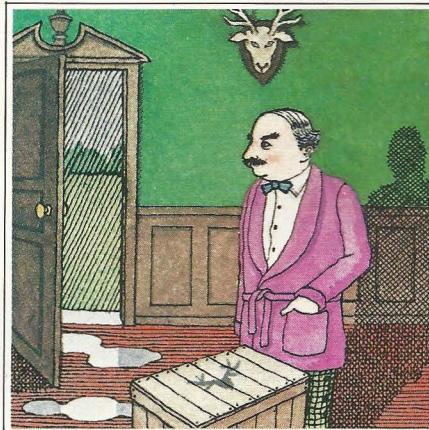
Another thing I've learned from this controversy: I'd much rather be listening to Cole Porter's *Miss Otis Regrets* than hearing *Otis Elevator Regrets* over and over again. You'd think, from the hue and cry, that Mr. De Palma had single-handedly set out to destroy the entire elevator-manufacturing industry with *one movie*. What nonsense.

Maybe five or six hundred thousand people will never set foot in an elevator again. But what does *that* mean when you consider the hundreds of millions of people who use elevators every single day and will continue to do so, *Dressed To Kill* or no *Dressed To Kill*? Actually, the five or six hundred thousand will bene-

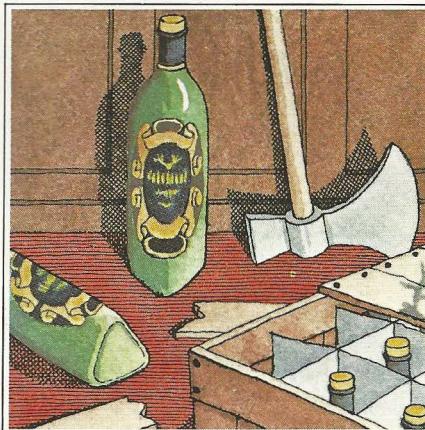


Drawing by Frank Modell

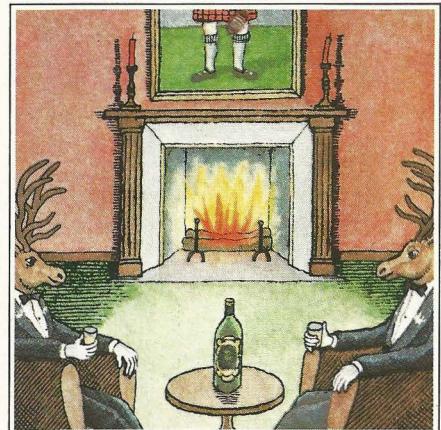
# THE CASE OF ·THE· 'AON BRAICH'



One rainy evening, a man with Gaelic on his breath delivered to my door a case of Glenfiddich. "Aon Braich," he murmured. No one here by that name, I mused. When I looked up, he had disappeared.



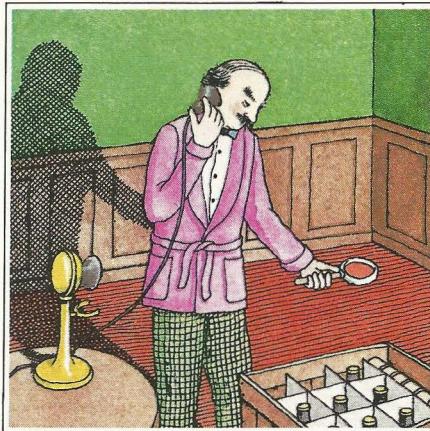
Upon cracking the cache of Glenfiddich with my Scottish Rites hatchet, I found each bottle of this distinctive malt whisky to be of triangular shape. Evidently, there were more sides to this story still.



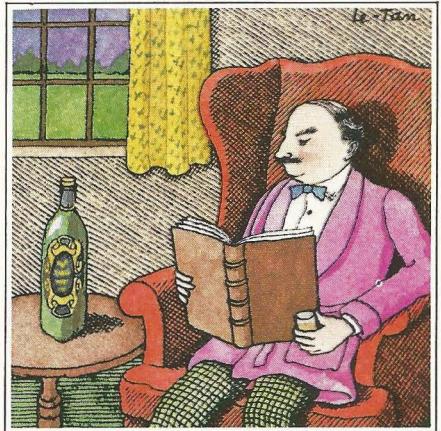
Examining the label, I detected a most intriguing clue: Glenfiddich is Gaelic for 'Valley of the Deer.' Had this peculiar charade been nothing more than a cleverly staged stag party invitation?



A sudden revelation struck me like a belt from Savile Row. Perhaps the peat-stained pages of MacTurf's 'Scotch On The Lochs' would hold the explanation. I reached for my volume — but the book was gone!



It was then my friend MacIntosh rang. "Aon Braich!" he intoned. That strange name again! "I'd have returned the book myself, but with this downpour..." Then I saw my MacTurf tucked 'midst the malts.



A newly-marked page revealed that it was the Glenfiddich that was 'aon braich,' or single malt. One sip confirmed its singular character. Rarely had a case led me to such a splendid solution.

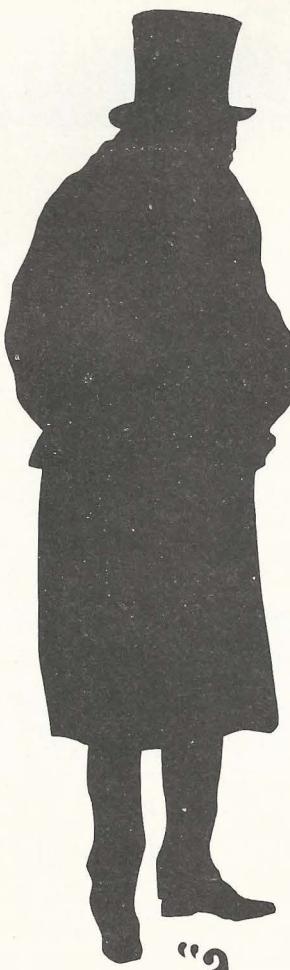


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fit from the change in life-style. Climbing stairs instead of riding in elevators will strengthen their cardiovascular systems. Here and there, a few will drop like flies, but they would have gone eventually anyway. You can't blame Brian De Palma for *everything*.

Some people try to, though. You'd be amazed at some of the attitudes and theories and pronouncements I hear being bruited about on local radio conversation stations and at the more boring cocktail and dinner parties in this film community of ours. And you can be sure that these very same Parlor Paulines go back to see the picture again and again.

*Dressed To Kill* gives blood, our most vital body fluid, a bad name. *Dressed To Kill* gives nurses' white shoes a bad name. *Dressed To Kill* gives subways, sunglasses, sex, marriage, infidelity, police detectives, New York City, telephone answering machines, prostitution, black leather coats, and murder a bad name. *Dressed To Kill* is going to alienate women from modern art because every time they go to a museum now and look at the work of a contemporary artist, they are going to experience this subconscious fear of dropping a glove and picking up a venereal disease.

If these seem like crazy notions to you, you haven't seen *Dressed To Kill* yet (and I told you not to *read* this), or you haven't read some of the wild letters I've seen in the papers, or heard the mouthings of some of my friends. *Dressed To Kill*, they say, is already taking its toll on the economy. Insurance companies are the hardest hit. Straying housewives are taking off their diamond rings in strange places and forgetting to put them back on with their panties. There has been a four hundred percent rise in traffic accidents in the big cities due to cab-drivers not watching where they're going because they're watching where they're coming, in the rearview mirror. Inflation had been leveling off; now it's worsening, because millions of low-income women are taking cabs they cannot afford, instead of busses, trolleys, and metros, in the misguided belief that the women's movement is most effective when it takes a backseat to a man.

Also dangerously inflationary, claim the worrywarts, is the call girl played by Mr. De Palma's wife, Nancy Allen. No \$100 hooker *she*. *She* asks for and gets \$500 for her services (the hooking, not the acting), and plays her role with such loveliness and sweetness and charm, especially in that black garter belt or whatever it was she was wearing, I

wasn't looking, that guys all over the country who might have thought twice before popping for \$100 are not going to think even once before going for the five bills.

Down on the Metal Exchange, specialists say that it was Miss Allen's hooker with a heart of gold, rather than the military conflict in the Middle East, that sent the precious yellow metal soaring to \$700 an ounce recently. On the face of it, this makes absolutely no sense, because at the very same time Quaker Oats common stock was rising only 1 1/4 even though an equal number of film fans thought Miss Allen's hooker had a heart of mush.

**O**f course, no De Palma picture would be a De Palma picture if it didn't send the film buffs scurrying to find hidden homages to Hitchcock in every sprocket hole. *Dressed To Kill* is, to them, a treasure trove, a field day.

The razor? *Spellbound*.  
The rain? *Foreign Correspondent*.  
The blond-wigged lady in the dark glasses and the long black coat? Karen Black in *Family Plot*.  
The elevator? A shower stall without water out of *Psycho*.

Teenager Keith Gordon snooping through the viewfinder of his camera? Jimmy Stewart in *Rear Window*.  
Two menacing black men on the subway platform with Nancy Allen becoming five or six menacing black men when the camera isn't watching? Blackbirds multiplying behind Tippi Hedren in *The Birds*.

The straight-down overhead shot of Nancy Allen in the shower stall? Henry Fonda in his cell in *The Wrong Man*.  
Michael Caine on the winding staircase in the psychiatric clinic? Jack the Ripper's hand descending on the balustrade in *The Lodger*.

Nancy Allen accidentally winding up with the bloody razor in her hand, causing the black lady to run away, shrieking? Cary Grant in *North by Northwest* finding himself with the murder knife in his hand in the United Nations while onlookers shriek, "Look out.... He's got a knife.... He did it..." (or whatever the idiot writer had them shriek).

So much for speculation. There is one thing about *Dressed To Kill* on which everyone seems to be in total agreement—the reason why Brian De Palma wears that beard.

Obviously, if he shaved, he'd cut himself to pieces.

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## Parting Shots From a Cable Crusader

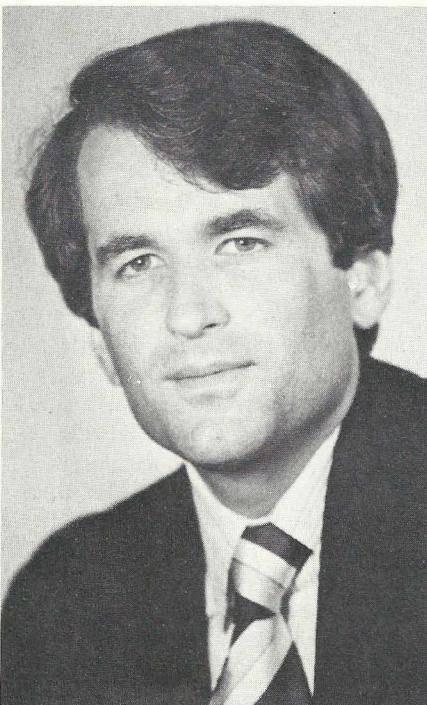
Martin Mayer

**T**he rash of liberalizing actions taken by the FCC in 1980 can be taken as a tribute to the unrelenting labors of a single staff member at the House of Representatives, Harry M. "Chip" Shooshan, who celebrated this triumph of long-held views by resigning in October as counsel to the Subcommittee on Communications and going off to seek what will doubtless be no small fortune as a communications lawyer and consultant. I debriefed him at the time, and herewith report.

Shooshan came to communications essentially by accident, signing on as an administrative assistant to Congressman Torbert Macdonald in 1969, about the time Macdonald became chairman of that subcommittee. A young man with carefully sculpted brown hair and an athletic figure, Shooshan has a rather aggressive temperament and considerable confidence. Finding himself in communications, Shooshan went looking for what was bust, with the thought that he might fix it. He found that the most grievous collection of regulatory bonds preventing the establishment of a potential public service was the set of FCC rules governing cable television. (His interest in cable later expanded to a more general concern about the interpenetration of government action and technology in the texture of electronic communications.)

Nothing much came of Shooshan's push toward a total rewrite of the Communications Act of 1934, because in coalition politics as presently conducted, a comprehensive approach tends to make enemies of everybody whose friends might be marginally harmed rather than make friends of those whose constituents might benefit. (Public credit for the push quite correctly goes, of course, to Congressman Lionel Van Deerlin, Macdonald's successor as chairman of the subcommittee and himself a broadcaster, who made the decisions about whether Shooshan's ideas had merit.) Still, Shooshan feels that the resulting debates

**"The problem in the future is that we're going to have a software shortfall. Are we up to the challenge of so many channels?... The cable companies can't afford not to have those channels filled."**



Harry M. "Chip" Shooshan

allocation of frequencies to low-powered local television transmitters across the country—are an effort to improve the diversity of programming. In one respect, I am quite sure the goals will be achieved: There will be a great increase in non-English-language programs available on television. How much more there will be for the ordinary English-speaking Joe, I don't know, and, interestingly, Shooshan is no longer so optimistic as he was.

"The problem in the future," he says, "is that we're going to have a software shortfall. Are we up to the challenge of so many channels? We hear the plaintive outcries from the creative community, the producers in Hollywood and New York. First the networks failed us, they say, then public television failed us, now cable is failing us. I have to ask, 'Is there a market for your product? Do people want to see what you make?' Still, the cable companies can't afford not to have those channels filled. They'll find things."

In any event, Shooshan argues, it isn't his business or the government's—or mine, for that matter—to restrict the possibilities of access to the home screen because we may believe there's nobody around to exploit it. After some hesitation, I have come around to his side. There isn't, I fear, much talent in the world—not enough to fill half a dozen channels a night (let alone half a hundred) with newly prepared entertainment or information that any noticeable audience really wants to see. But it isn't going to cost that much to give lots of people a try, and when it's all done, we'll have spare channels around for repeat performances of the shows we missed, which still seems to me (not to Shooshan) the real benefit of channel redundancy.

**S**hooshan anticipates a "mixed system" of telecommunications, with free broadcast, cable from broadcast, pay broadcast, pay cable, local, national, and direct to home from satellite

"changed all the attitudes around here"—and that "the vigor of our oversight" in keeping tabs on the FCC "got the vital juices flowing at the commission."

The two big changes ordered by the FCC this year—permission to cable systems to import distant signals at will and

Keith Jewell

all coexisting more or less profitably. "Broadcasters will have a less-preferred position, but they'll survive. I think the hysteria they promulgate is just hype." Especially in the big cities, where the wiring job is expensive, Shooshan expects pay broadcast (in town) and pay cable (in suburbs) to flourish side by side. Part of the secret will be the immense expansion of services through the television set, such as Teletext and Viewdata, drawing on computer memories, offering information ranging from the menus of local restaurants to the exegesis of Mallarmé and corporate 10-K reports.

The question of whether pay cable will be a local monopoly, Shooshan feels, will be answered in the short run by the litigation now proceeding in the *Premiere* case. *Premiere*, in case you haven't been paying attention, is a consortium of four movie producers—Columbia, MCA, Paramount, and Twentieth Century-Fox—with Getty Oil. Its purpose is to provide a pay television service in competition with Home Box Office, Showtime, and Warner-Amex Satellite Entertainment Corp., the three major entities already in that business. The Justice Department has sued to keep *Premiere* from starting its business, alleging antitrust violations. The three existing pay television providers have submitted hearty Amens in the form of supporting briefs.

The problem with this is that the owners of the current pay television providers are also the owners of cable systems—Time Inc. owns HBO; Viacom and Teleprompter own Showtime. Shooshan reports that a recent survey for the subcommittee failed to turn up a single cable system owned by Time Inc. that offered its subscribers Showtime, or one in the Viacom or Teleprompter system that offered HBO. (Teleprompter has since announced that, as an experiment, it will put HBO programming on twelve of its smaller systems.) The movie companies involved with *Premiere* claim that because the pay television companies are not in competition with each other for the same customers, they won't offer for the product anything like what that product is worth. Thus the only way the movie producers can protect themselves is by entering the business on their own, and they can't do that individually.

One way out of this dilemma would be for Congress to make cable companies common carriers, requiring them to sell channels for the use of all pay television operators; another would be to divorce the ownership of cable systems from the

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**"Equal time is a tremendous disaster. This year, you have to ask yourself, Where did the decision come from to leave the presidential debates in the hands of the League of Women Voters?"**

ownership of pay television program providers. "Congress," Shooshan says with practiced caution, "has a predisposition not to impose common carrier status on the cable systems, and it has rejected divorcement." (Shooshan knows that for a fact, having recommended such a step in a staff report four years ago, and having been slapped down.)

"But at the state level," Shooshan says, "they're going to begin looking at cable pretty soon. The state public utilities commissions that regulate the telephone company will say cable is just another closed transmission system. The way the localities award franchises is outrageous—companies promising to do things cheap and then jacking up the price, city councilmen getting stock or contracts to do work for the winners. The states will move in, and conflicting decisions by the different states will lead to pressure on Congress for legislation. These things are slow, but they will come."

**A**nother area where Shooshan expects to see a crusade validated is political television. The subcommittee draft rewrite of the 1934 act dropped the Fairness Doctrine (this is one of the reasons why it got nowhere), and Shooshan has no desire to try again, personally. But he sees other forces on the horizon.

"Equal time," he says, "is a tremendous disaster. This year, you have to ask yourself, Where did the decision come from to leave the presidential debates in the hands of the League of Women Voters? And the answer is: that crazy FCC Aspen Institute decision in 1975, which said it was OK for the networks to cover bona fide news events without giving equal time, but not to set things up themselves."

"My position is that broadcasters need the same First Amendment rights print journalists have, and that the protection of the public lies in diversity and com-

petition, not in regulations. But when we got into this fight, the newspapers and magazines pretty much sat it out. Now it's beginning to sink in on these publishers that with the convergence of technologies, they may get these rules applied to them. They're interested in Teletext, in printing the newspaper in your living room or putting it on your screen. Well, when they do that, they might become subject to the Communications Act."

"Section 326 of the act," Shooshan continues, warming to his subject, "says, No censorship. It's been a nullity because the courts have read it to say, No prior restraint. So the FCC reads competing applications for franchises every three years, and if you're not doing the programming job you promised, they can take away your license. If that's not prior restraint, I don't know what is."

Shooshan wants to free the entrepreneurs of this business not because he thinks they're doing well but because he thinks if left alone in a competitive environment they might do better. "Look," he says, "I think the stuff now is inane, and getting worse. My wife and I a couple of years ago began cutting back on how much we let our daughters watch. Sure, they had withdrawal symptoms at first. We cut out all watching on school nights; they complained that their friends were all talking about something they didn't see. But they're twelve and ten now, and they're healthier and happier kids. I don't want to be too critical of kids' viewing—literally until I was out of college, I read only one section of the newspaper carefully, the sports section. But this thing becomes an addiction."

In some ways, Shooshan has found it a frustrating eleven years. "You know," he says, "the breakthroughs in communications technology have been made in the United States, but the fruits have been gathered elsewhere. That's because we've forced our broadcasters and cable operators to build their industry around the barriers of regulation. We've got to start looking at the variety of media the technology has given us. You can't say now that you're legislating or regulating for broadcasting or cable or telephone companies. They're all entities in competition with each other for the same market; they're all purveyors of entertainment and information. When the policymakers recognize this, and they're going to have to recognize it soon, we'll get the kind of legislation that helps us take advantage of our talent and technology instead of frustrating them."

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## Festival Report

# The Shining Dark Horses of Edinburgh

Harlan Kennedy

**T**his was the last Edinburgh International Film Festival to be directed by Lynda Myles, Scotland's very own movie messiah. In eight years as director, she has turned the event from a solemn Calvinist watch-in into one of the youngest and most forward-looking festivals in Europe. Fellow Caledonian Jim Hickey will be taking over next year, after Myles leaps the Atlantic to take charge of the Pacific Film Archive at Berkeley.

Edinburgh under Myles has always been hotter after movies *trouvés* than prestigious big-budget cinema, and this year's lineup of shining dark horses was typically and wondrously eclectic. Hong Kong murder thrillers, feminist documentaries, early silent and sound films from the National Film Archive unreeled in staccatolike succession. Rich retrospectives of new Scottish filmmaker John Mackenzie and veteran American B-feature maestro Joseph H. Lewis

**Edinburgh has always been hotter after movie *trouvés* than prestigious big-budget cinema, and this year's lineup was typically and wondrously eclectic.**

flashed through the movie projectors.

Among the movies, common trends quickly popped up as cinema and television sidled ever nearer to each other. "Feature films"—those old 35mm warhorses at regulation ninety minutes plus—were outnumbered this year by movies with a variety of lengths, at anything from three minutes to seventy-three and in either 16mm or Super-8. From the United States, for instance, stomped

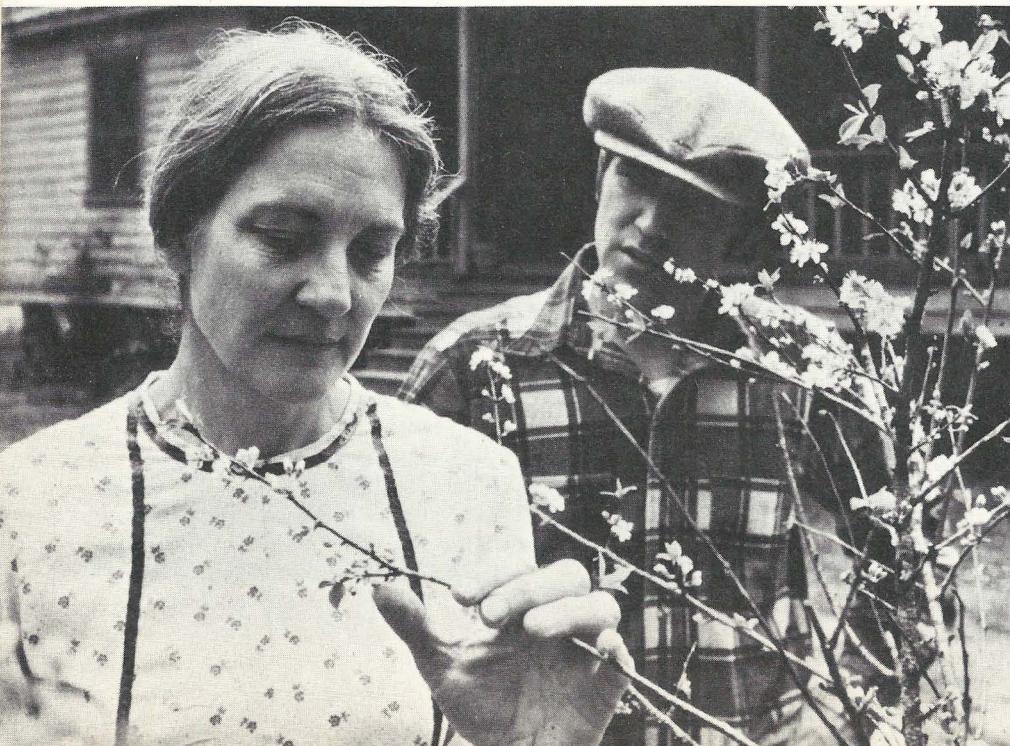
a gang of Super-8 punk movies, flaunting a mite too ferally their mega-Warhol overkill of "bad" acting and ad hoc scripting, but still an eye-opener to the possibilities of cheap, viable, and often striking filmmaking. Also came an avalanche of weird and wobbly low-budget features. Charlie Ahearn's *Twins* and Eric Mitchell's *Underground USA* are nose-thumbing comedies made at the point where punk meets junk. Moving up the pile was Joel DeMott's *Demon Lover Diary*, a fitfully sparkling "documentary noir" about the infighting among a film crew shooting a horror movie.

But best of all the U.S. independent films was Victor Nuñez's *Gal Young Un*. The story basics are straight out of Awful Warning melodrama. Down Florida way, handsome fortune hunter meets sere but moneyed widow and marries her. Soon the home is echoing to the patter of his not-so-tiny mistresses, and the old lady is left managing her bridegroom's new moonshine whiskey business. Will she grin and bear it, or up and take revenge?

Nuñez paces the film like a master, with creaking, rocking chair silences and slowly crescent menace. The shooting style is plain and patient, but the rewards arrive in a rivetingly cathartic climax and in the growing authority of Dana Preu's performance as the old lady: walnut features, wispy hair, and a dryly glowering stoicism.

**B**ritain's independent films were more "finished" than America's, but could have used some of the latter's shabby fire. Of the half-dozen movies entered by the British Film Institute Production Board, the most watchable was Richard Woolley's *Brothers and Sisters*, the weirdest were Yvonne Rainer's *Journeys From Berlin/1971* and Anthea Kennedy and Nick Burton's *At the Fountainhead*. All were heavily freighted with sociopolitical message making, which seems to be a sine qua

*The festival's best American independent film was Gal Young Un, with Dana Preu and David Peck.*



non of the BFI's funding requirements these days.

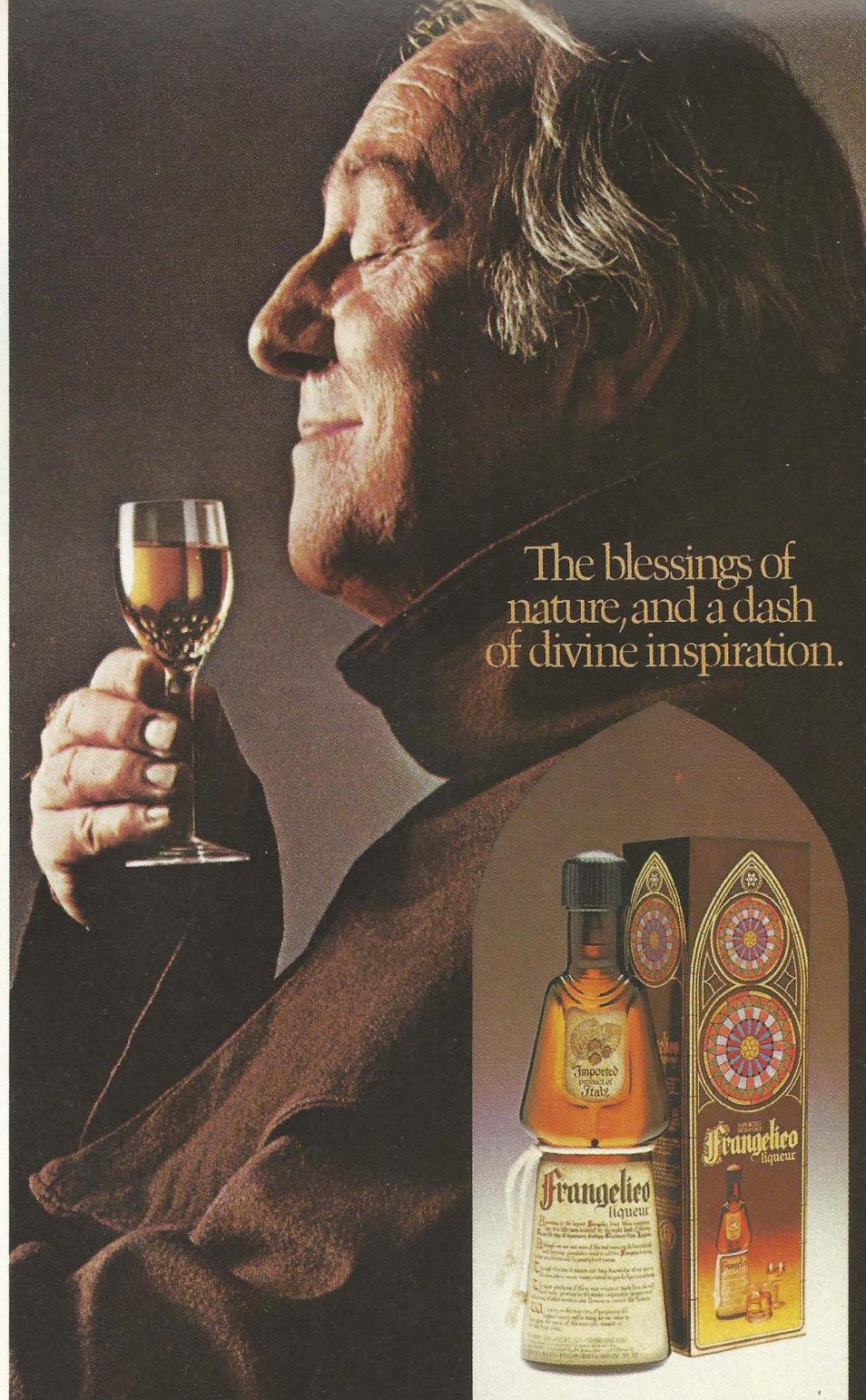
*Brothers and Sisters* uses a crosscut thriller format as the vehicle for its exploration of sexist attitudes in modern Britain. A prostitute is killed, and the police investigation passes over two brothers of upper-class birth: One has become a Sloppy Joe liberal living in a commune; the other is an army major full of bluff stuffiness and made-to-order male chauvinism. The liberal's hypocrisies are neatly exposed, and so are the frailties beneath the major's Blimpish facade. Which of them dunnit?—if either—the film asks. And by withholding a definite answer, while dangling a real killing over these case study characterizations, the film cleverly catalyzes our interest in which of their diverging brands of sexual prejudice (and, by extension, our own) might have exploded in murder.

*Brothers and Sisters* is stylishly shot, with bright colors and trompe l'oeil angles. It's too talky by half, but then what recent BFI film isn't? *At the Fountainhead* is too talky by three-quarters, a didactic drone-on set in modern Britain with bits of archive and newsreel footage from Third Reich Germany. Directors Kennedy and Burton lay out before us, like a corpse on the anatomy table, the experiences of a real-life Jewish refugee who fled to Britain from Nazi Germany in the thirties and of three friends who stayed behind in partitioned Germany. The split-narrative method heats our blood in order to move us to conclusions that are contradictory, naive, or both.

Germany also rears its head in *Journeys From Berlin/1971*, a political-psychological collage that lasts a full, feeling 125 minutes. Again the voice track works overtime, but at least the images are more hypnotic: a jazzy jumble of the animate and the inanimate, the dramatic and the iconic. There is also underground film critic Annette Michelson jawing through some rivetingly surreal and outspoken scenes as a patient in psychoanalysis.

It's hard to imagine any of these films unfurling on the big screens of commercial cinema. They belong inalienably in the twilight land between movies and television, and so does Ken Loach's latest, *The Gamekeeper*. This isn't as good as *Black Jack*, his masterpiece of offhand eighteenth-century manners, and it tends to plop Britain's leading drama documentarist back into the salt-of-the-earth socialism that has been his television stock-in-trade. But at its best, this feature-

*Continued on page 74*



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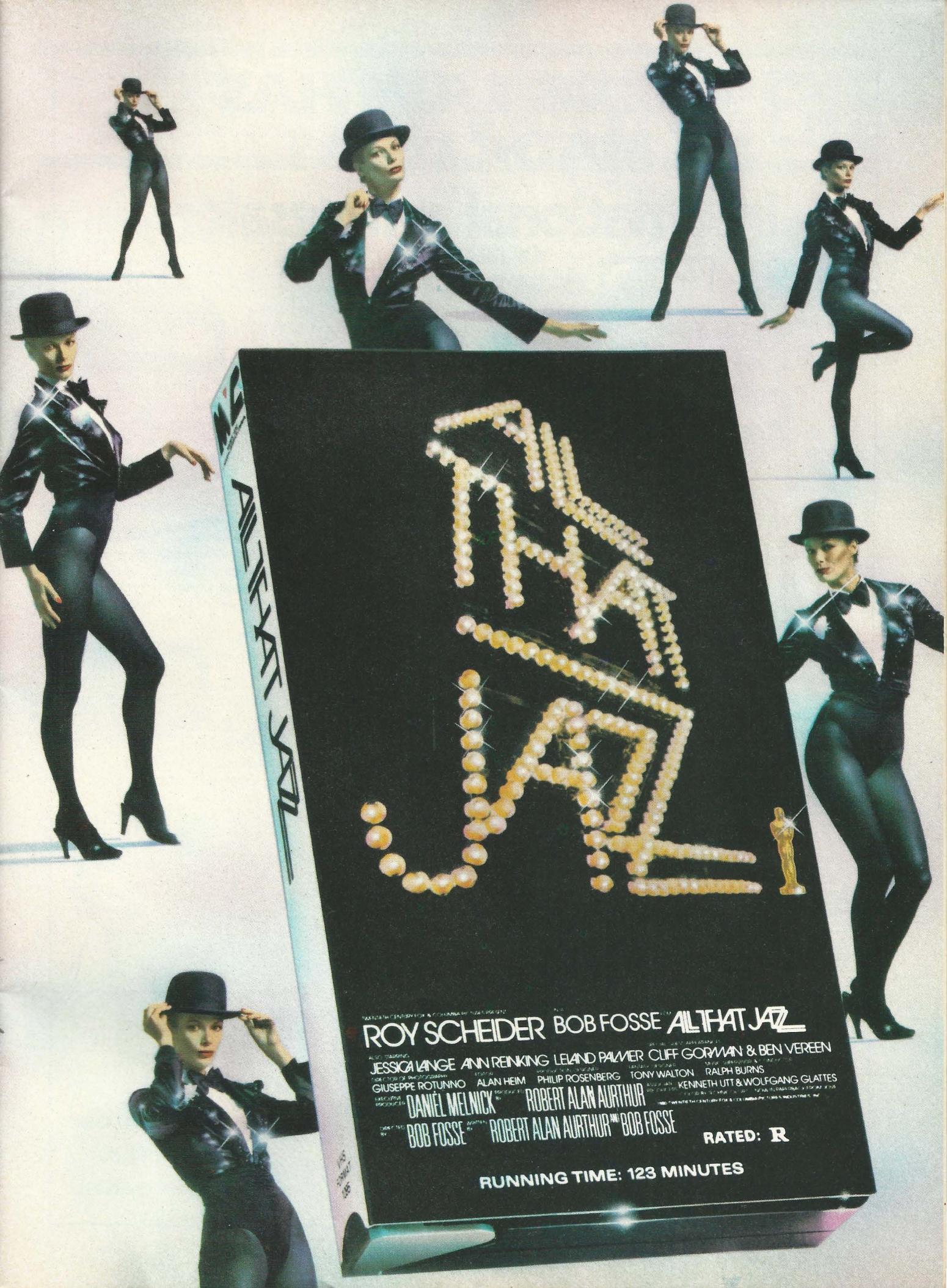
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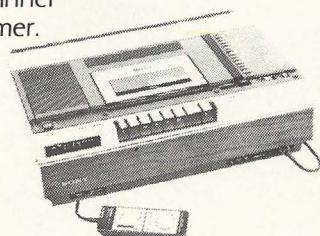
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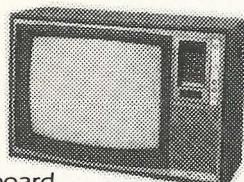
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Developments in Programming  
and Technology Affecting  
the Home Viewer  
December 1980

# THE VIDEO SCENE

## Hardware for the Holidays

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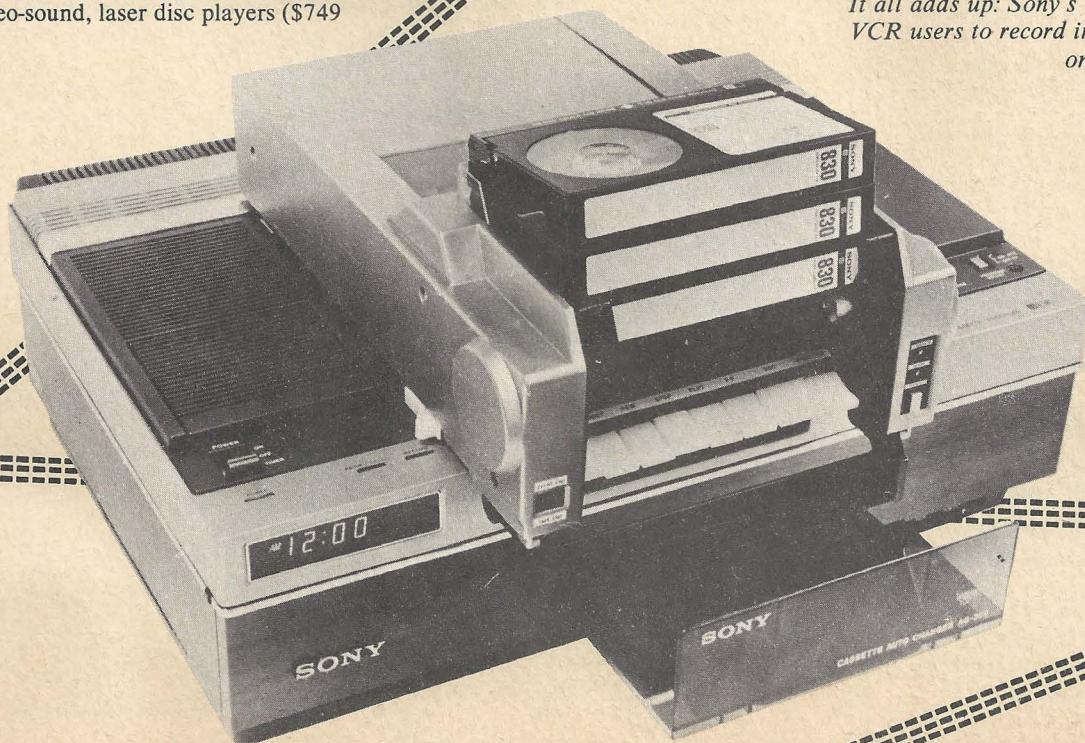
**T**he fledgling video industry is following the audio industry's pattern of introducing new products in June at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago. By now the newest of the new has just reached retail dealers in electronic dreams. As befits the emerging home entertainment phenomenon, the new is exploding on not one or two fronts but on no less than five or six: in videodiscs; in very lightweight and very portable videocassette recorders; in stripped-down and very affordable recorders; or in recorders offering more features than ever before, like stereophonic sound or a stacking capacity for up to four tapes; in little home editors; and in giant televisions with extraordinarily good speakers. Did I say just five or six new areas?

First, and always foremost in the hype and hopes of many a manufacturer, is the videodisc. There is at last more action than talk in this category. Pioneer and Magnavox are both selling their compatible, stereo-sound, laser disc players (\$749

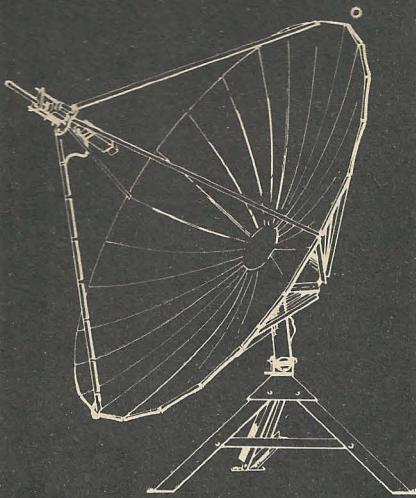


*Faithful adaptation: Sony's film chain adapter allows home movies to be shown on a television screen.*

*It all adds up: Sony's "BetaStack" allows VCR users to record individual programs on separate cassettes.*



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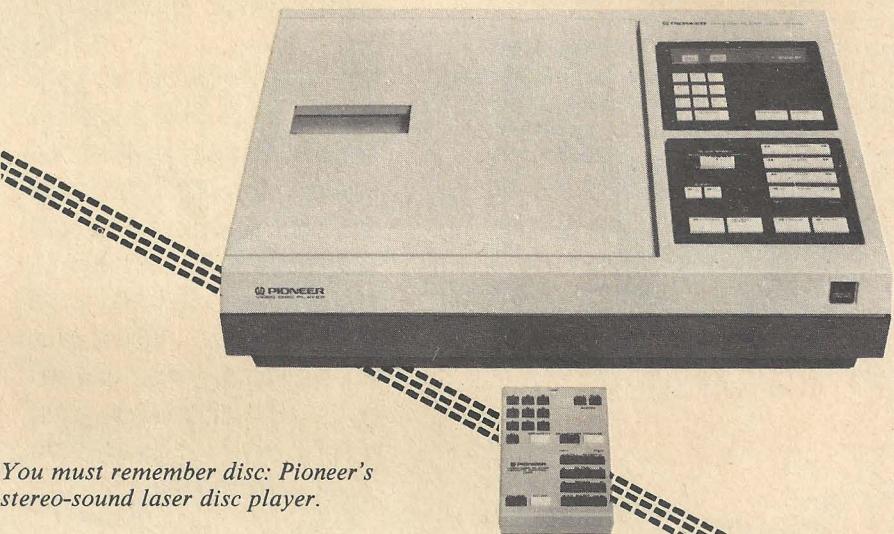
and \$775, respectively). The discs themselves are in fairly short supply, but MCA, their manufacturer, does have at least a score or more features available wherever the players are sold—which is not yet all over the country, but by our own estimate, one is never more than five hundred miles away from a videodisc player.

Lightweights, or portables, or creative video. By any name, it now makes a great deal more sense to make one's home movies on video rather than film. As a matter of fact, even if one has an extensive collection of films, a switch to video can quickly pay for itself, if one intends to add to that collection.

In any case, most everyone has some old home movies sitting around. A perfect addition for someone who already owns a videocassette recorder (VCR) is a film chain adapter, so those films can be shown on the television screen. One of the first of these is the Sony VCR 3, which, as with all other units of this type, hooks on to a video camera, in this case the Sony HVC 1000.

As for cameras, attention must be paid to the trend among almost every manufacturer involved to produce really fine video cameras, incorporating just about every feature of broadcast-quality models. However, don't be fooled into thinking that all video cameras, even color cameras, must cost close to a thousand dollars. RCA, in particular, emphasizes the lower-priced cameras in its line—cameras whose price is entirely competitive with Super-8 film cameras. Many of the features which have been sacrificed to shave the price are capabilities that the home filmmaker has never had anyway. And a film camera with expensive lenses, meters, and manual overrides to automatic features costs about what an exceptional video camera like the JVC GX-77U does (about \$750 retail; \$1050 list).

Whether one contemplates a recorder to go with one's camera or perhaps a VCR now and a camera later, it's wisest to go portable. If \$1200 for the recorder and an extra \$400 for a detachable tuner-timer is within one's range, then the new Akai ActiVideo VP-7350 is certainly the



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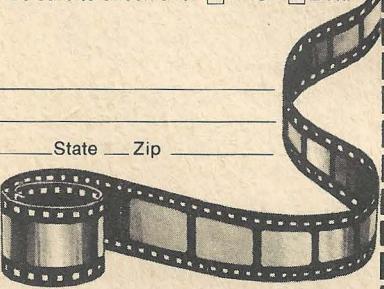
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ultimate in portable, half-inch video (VHS in this case). Features include Dolby noise reduction for the stereo sound track, both two-hour and six-hour play and recording, and a dew-warning indicator for excessive and deleterious internal moisture. Akai envisions the stereo sound to be valuable in bilingual education, as well as for those producing their own ultimate cinematic fantasies.

The VHS format may not be the future of portable home video. That distinction may not belong to archrival Beta either, but could rest with a new quarter-inch, and even smaller and lighter, format. Technicolor, a name familiar to most of us, has just gotten itself into this business, marketing a seven-pound minirecorder made by Funai of Japan. This VCR offers surprisingly good picture quality and is compatible with any existing video camera; Technicolor will soon market a very small and light one of its own. The Funai unit now presents a great alternative to home movies, at a \$995 list price—not including a camera, of course. Tapes for the minirecorder come in half-hour length (and soon in hour length) from Fuji Photo Film for about ten dollars.

Along with this trend of the extension toward the ultimate is one toward extension of availability. In other words, we're starting to see no-frills packages. A certain popular clamoring has obviously reached some of the video sources across the Pacific; to wit, who wants to pay an extra four hundred or so to be able to tape six programs while away for two weeks? Clearly, some people do, but then many people don't. VCRs with no ability to program, or with the rudimentary ability to tape one thing at a time, at one time on one day, are retailing in the five- to six-hundred-dollar range. Notable brands are Sharp, Sanyo, and RCA.

Need a gift for the videophile with a Beta deck who thinks he has everything? Does he or she possess an AG-3 or AG-4 stacking module, from Sony, which will stack three or four cassettes for continuous play? For either Beta or VHS units, there's the Commercial Alert, from Vidicraft, which promises to do away with upward of ninety percent of those pesky interruptions. Finally, for the true video freak, there's always an extra television. There is a thing or two new to be said on this old subject, with monitor-quality image and immensely improved sound from the likes of RCA's XL-100 and Sanyo's 91C94N, and with the unique automatic tuning of Hitachi's five-inch, portable CK-200.

N.I. Weinstock is a recording engineer and contributing editor of *Stereo and Hi Fi Times* and *AudioVideo*.

# All Over the World

Gary Arlen

In this time of multinational corporations, dramatically increased overseas investments, and, at least for some countries, favorable rates of currency exchange, it's no surprise that the international market in home video is booming. "The home video revolution has no nationality," announces Andre Blay, presi-

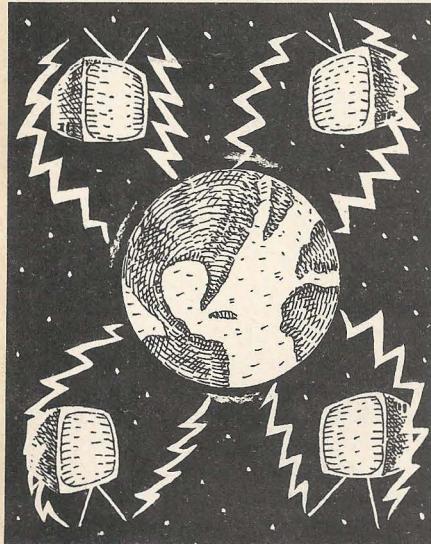


Illustration by Dan Sherbo

dent of Magnetic Video Corporation, currently the largest American distributor of prerecorded motion pictures. "American entertainment," he adds, "is one of our most exportable commodities."

And, for the moment at least, the balance of trade seems to be in America's favor on the video scene. American film and television executives have found foreign markets, particularly in Europe, to be more than a little receptive to videodiscs and videocassettes, but their European counterparts are beginning to realize that the burgeoning demand for video product in America is an open invitation for their own wares.

"So far it has been largely a one-way flow," says Judith Jones, a New York-based video consultant who closely follows the international video scene. American films dominate the market for now, with a few foreign titles showing up in U.S. distributors' catalogs. But, as Andre Blay points out, firms such as Magnetic Video are making more than a token effort to develop rosters of foreign titles. These films will be distributed first within the country of origin, but many may even-

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tually find their way to home screens in America.

Among those experts who forecast an increasing exchange of video productions is RCA's Herbert S. Schlosser, who is in charge of that company's videodisc operations. "As the videodisc industry grows," says Schlosser, "the diversity of programs from many sources will increase." Among the European productions RCA has licensed for videodisc distribution in the United States are the ballet *Giselle* featuring Rudolf Nureyev, several British presentations of Shakespeare plays starring Laurence Olivier, and such recent films as Ingmar Bergman's *Autumn Sonata* and *Cries and Whispers*.

**A**lthough home video may seem a trifling issue, given the scope of today's international problems, its importance has not escaped the attention of political leaders. French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing mentions the topic in many of his speeches, and Sir Harold Wilson, the former British prime minister, now heads a task force which is looking into British policies for the new video environment.

But the bottom line is the European viewers, hungry for product. The fact is, European television offers few options. Even in major capitals like London and Paris, there are only two or three television stations, and many have very limited viewing hours, as few as five hours per day in some German cities.

American and European companies hope to fill this video void by offering vast amounts of prerecorded programs. Most U.S. VCR owners use their equipment for time shifting (recording for playback at another time), but the paucity of European broadcasting may mean that viewers there will require more shows distributed by way of cassettes and discs. In the process of creating shows for those outlets, European producers may find that many of the programs will make their way to American viewers as well.

Of course, creating an international video market is fraught with its own set of problems; this is no simple matter of shipping tapes around the world. There are the technical standards which make video incompatible between some countries. ("Standards" refers to the number of scan lines across a video screen, among other technical factors.) France and most Eastern European countries, for example, use the SECAM format, while England, Belgium, the Netherlands, and West Germany use the PAL technology. The United States and Japan share the same color television standard, called NTSC, one reason why much of the new video technology developed in Japan was marketed in the United States first.

The standards problems can be overcome, but not without complications. For motion pictures, a print may be shipped

to a foreign laboratory for duplication directly onto videocassettes in that country's standard. But as more programs such as concerts, plays, and other performances are produced directly on videotape, a new process is necessary: standards conversion. This procedure is routinely used by PBS and commercial networks, but it is expensive (about two and a half times the cost of simple duplicating), and currently there are only six labs in the United States that can do it.

Another problem is the subtitling of films for international distribution. As anyone who has watched a subtitled movie on television knows, it generally doesn't work for a theatrical print to be shown on a video screen; the letters are too small or awkwardly placed. Thus it might be necessary to retitle some films as well as convert them for the video screen. That procedure could prove too expensive for the limited distribution some esoteric titles would have.

Technical problems aside, enthusiasm still runs high for creating an international video market. The exact structure is still being worked out, but the major movie companies will certainly play a significant role. According to Judith Jones, European book publishers and the major record companies are jockeying for position in the distribution of video programs.

During these formative days, the new international video entrepreneurs are capitalizing on their experience in distributing other forms of entertainment. One gauge movie studios use for determining how to release videocassettes is the theatrical box-office barometer.

"We'll use our theatrical experience to look at how a specific title did in that market," says Alan Fields, vice-president for corporate planning at Paramount Pictures. Studios have extensive records on how their films fare abroad. Fields cites the Sergio Leone Western *Once Upon a Time in the West*, which bombed in the United States but has been so popular in England and Germany that Paramount rereleases it there every year. It would be a likely candidate for international video distribution. An international marketing director for a major U.S. distributor cites similar differences between countries. In Germany there is a demand for musical performances; in Great Britain video tastes lean toward documentaries, music, and classic—rather than recent—feature films.

Some hit movies, such as *10*, sell well everywhere in the world, says Andre Blay, but from his experience during the past few years, he has spotted distinct national differences. British tastes are more subtle than those of American video buyers, he claims, pointing out that a production of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor is selling well on videocassette in England, but Magnetic Video doesn't even

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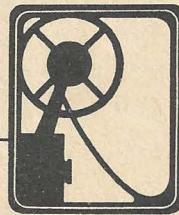
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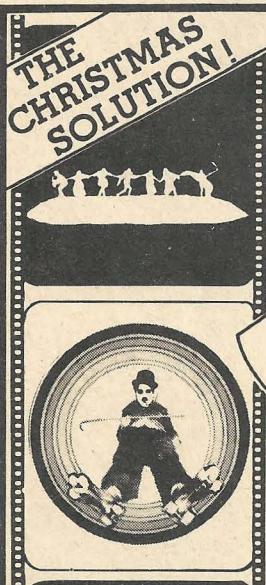
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plan to offer it in the United States.

French tastes, according to Blay, run to dramatic movies, while the German video audience leans toward action films. Australian preferences seem closer to Americans', but only in general ways, and not for specific titles. There are other variations; for example, the videocassette of *The Sound of Music* was immensely popular in the United States, Scandinavia, England, and France, but a flop in Germany.

Given such vagaries, Magnetic Video is understandably cautious about opening international markets. Its U.S. catalog, for example, lists about 240 titles, of which only 65 are sold in Europe.

**T**he overseas video revolution is not limited to cassettes and discs. Satellite and pay television, which have boomed in the United States during the past five years, are about to make their mark worldwide. Cable television has appeared in only a few European countries, most notably Belgium, and through a number of unlicensed systems in Italy. Broadcast satellites, which could send television programs directly into each home, are being actively developed, most aggressively by a French-German cooperative effort.

All these ventures in transmission of programming are immensely appealing, since they open up more channels to the program-starved European television viewer. However, each is the subject of intense political debate, as nationalistic desires appear to be at odds with the expanded delivery capacity of satellites. The closely bunched European nations don't like the idea that shows produced by government authorities in adjoining countries can be beamed to their citizens. Satellite television has frequently been discussed in the British Parliament, where members are incensed that proposed continental television satellites would be able to beam shows to almost every British household, stealing viewers from the venerable BBC.

A final consideration facing U.S. home video suppliers, and especially the movie studios, as they formulate their European marketing tactics is how to placate their other overseas customers, such as networks and movie theater owners. According to Paramount's Fields, exhibitors have enormous clout in Europe, and it's no secret how unhappy American theater owners have become over the distribution of motion pictures through videocassettes and pay television.

Nonetheless, Fields believes that European exhibitors are resigned to the arrival of home video competition: "They've seen enough happen over here to know that, whether they like it or not, it's going to happen."

Gary Arlen is a Washington-based writer and consultant on video.

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# The Stormy Saga of Popeye

Or, How an Unlikely Crew  
Guided a Musical to Port



**O**ne night several years ago, Robert Evans ran into Robert Altman at Elaine's, the New York restaurant. It was an unlikely encounter. Evans is a high-living producer who represents mainstream Hollywood; Altman is a maverick director who spurns the moviemaking establishment. But Evans discovered that night that he had something in common with Altman: back trouble. In fact, Altman was in so much pain, Evans remembers, that he could hardly walk. "I said, 'Bob, I have a doctor for you.' And I got him an appointment with my doctor, who had practically saved my life."

Some time later, the two men met again at Elaine's, and a grateful Altman said, "I can't tell you what it means to me. I'm a new man now." Soon after, a note written on the back of a check arrived at Altman's table. The note was from Evans, and it read, "You owe me a picture." Altman wrote back, "I owe you my life."

Now some three years later, just in time for the holiday season, the results of that unlikely alliance of Hollywood insider and Hollywood outsider will open in theaters around the country. The picture is *Popeye*, a \$20 million musical based on the comic strip created by E.C. Segar. It stars Robin Williams as the spinach-eating sailor and Shelley Duvall as his girl friend, Olive Oyl, and it celebrates the solid virtues of individualism.

That's an appropriate theme, given the strongly differing personalities of the producer and the director, who somehow managed to cooperate long enough to complete the film. But *Popeye* brought together other singular types as well, like pop composer Harry Nilsson, who wrote the music and lyrics for the movie, and cartoonist and playwright Jules Feiffer, who wrote the screenplay. (Not to mention an extraordinary coproducing arrangement that brought together Walt Disney Productions and Paramount.)

**T**he idea for a *Popeye* movie started with Robert Evans, who was once an actor (*The Fiend Who Walked the West*) and later a high-powered Paramount executive, but whose much-publicized life-style has sometimes obscured his notable work as a producer (like *The Godfather* and *Chinatown*). One evening in 1977—characteristically he recalls the exact date, May 13—Evans emerged from the Broadway musical *Annie* and

made up his mind to do the film version. He called Paramount to inaugurate bidding on the film rights. But when the price soared to \$10 million, Evans dropped out.

Soon after, Evans learned that Paramount owned the rights to another comic strip character, *Popeye the Sailor*. What about a live-action *Popeye* musical? Evans was smitten with the idea. He called his friend Dustin Hoffman and proposed it, since they were in the market for something together. Hoffman liked the idea. Then Richard Sylbert, at the time an executive producer working with Evans, suggested that Jules Feiffer do the screenplay, "because Feiffer is the only guy who can make cartoon characters come alive on the screen." Evans immediately called Feiffer, tracking him down at a dinner party in New York.

Feiffer, whose last screenplay had been for *Carnal Knowledge*, had once met Evans and regarded him, unflatteringly, as "the traditional type of Hollywood producer." But Feiffer happened to cherish the cartoon work of E.C. Segar, and he listened to Evans with interest. Feiffer told Evans that he would write the script only if he could emulate the civil and charming strips of Segar's *Popeye*, and not the animated *Popeye* of the Fleischer brothers. Evans replied that he wanted to do whichever *Popeye* Feiffer wanted.

An agreement was reached over the phone, and Feiffer went to work on a treatment that would be an homage to Segar. He read up on Segar's career and viewed thousands of feet of comic strips on microfilm. He decided to focus the script on *Popeye's* romance with Olive Oyl in the town of Sweethaven and on his search for his long-lost father. Evans told Feiffer that he wanted the movie to be about "affirmation and morality," an entertainment for children as well as adults. The two agreed that the movie's theme should be *Popeye's* own credo: "I yam what I yam (and that's all that I yam)."

"Quite frankly," says Evans, "that's what attracted me to 'Popeye' more than anything else. Though it was written fifty years ago, it's so much more 'today' than it was fifty years ago. That's what I wanted to get across in the story—that one line. People are individuals. They are what they are." Soon Lily Tomlin was announced as Olive Oyl. Hal Ashby signed on as director. Dustin Hoffman, who was to play *Popeye*, began working with a choreographer.

Then something went wrong. Feiffer's early drafts were a little too "special effecty," as he himself admits, though the rewriting, emphasizing the romance, went well. But Hoffman began to back off, and when Feiffer, an old friend, met privately with him, matters did not improve. Feiffer recalls, "It ended up just very unfriendly, and I still don't remember finding out a damn thing about what he felt about the movie."

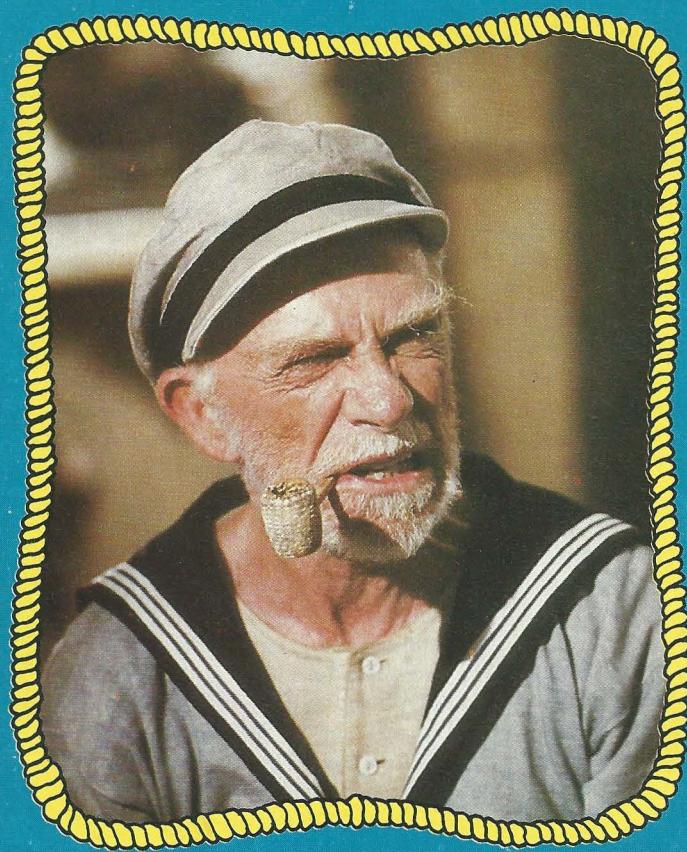
To the astonishment of virtually everyone, Evans backed his screenwriter and not his star. Hoffman left the project. "He couldn't believe that I stayed with Jules rather than him," Evans says. "But I believed Jules was right." Hoffman's departure, though, left a big hole. "With Dustin, I had a go from Paramount. Without Dustin, I had nothing but a script."

Evans remembers a meeting with studio executives soon after. "It was the strangest thing. I said, 'Fellas, you don't need a star for this picture. Anybody can play *Popeye*.' They said, 'If you can get Jack Nicholson or Al Pacino, that's one thing, but we're not going to make this picture with just anybody. It's too expensive.' Now I didn't even know who Robin Williams was, frankly. But I knew that he'd just come out in a series and was the talk of the town. I had never seen 'Mork & Mindy.' I said, 'We could use . . . Robin Williams.' The name just popped off my tongue. Michael Eisner said, 'Robin Williams, what an idea!' And Barry Diller said, 'Wow, that's great!' And that's how the whole thing started."

Suddenly, with Williams, an improvisational actor who was television's newest rage (and conveniently affiliated with Paramount through ABC), the project was given fresh impetus. But Hal Ashby, in the meantime, had moved on to another project, and Evans now went shopping for a director.



Paul Ronald



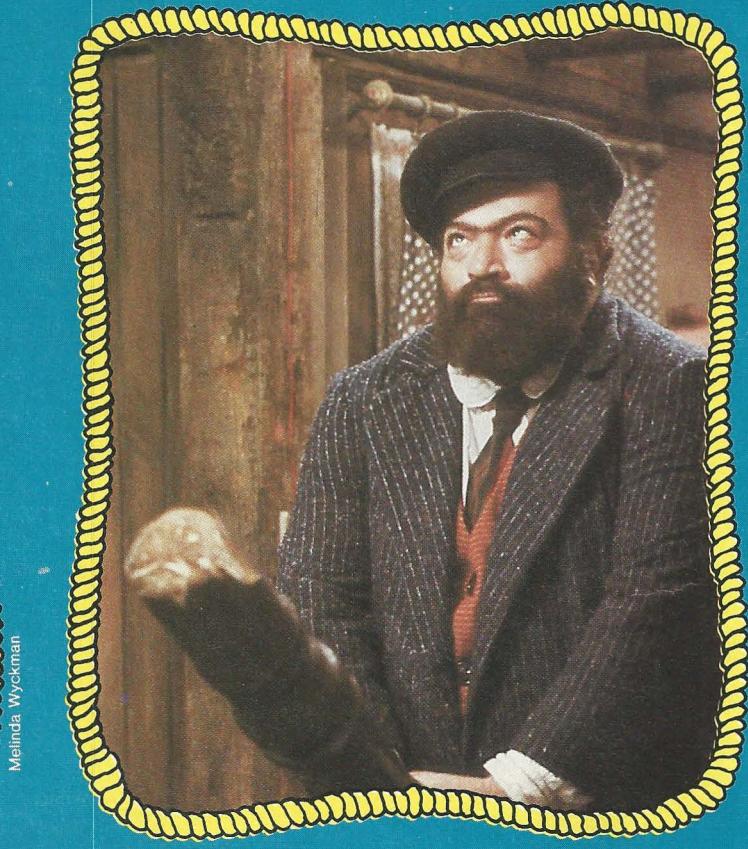
*Popeye's long-lost Pappy (Ray Walston).*



*Wimpy, the burger king (Paul Dooley).*



*The demure and alluring Olive Oyl (Shelley Duvall).*



*Bluto, the short-fused bully (Paul L. Smith).*

**T**he teaming of Evans and Altman seemed as preposterous to them as it did to others—at first. “Without knowing him,” Altman admits, “I thought it would be a disaster. I don’t like the kind of pictures he makes. I don’t like the kind of publicity he is associated with.” For his part, Evans acknowledges that he didn’t like Altman’s last few pictures, “but I judge a director by his best, not his worst.” The best, many critics agree, includes films like *M\*A\*S\*H*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, and *Nashville*. But Altman’s recent films, among them *A Wedding*, *Quintet*, and *A Perfect Couple*, have aroused little interest. Some critics, in fact, have begun to dismiss Altman as a director of little importance. His reputation has not been helped by reports that a new film, *Health*, has so far been kept out of general release by Twentieth Century-Fox.

Altman happened to see the script for *Popeye* when Sam Cohn, a New York agent, handed him a copy and asked for his opinion. Altman read it and decided that it was “difficult but would make a helluva movie.” He told Cohn he would love to direct it “if I could get assurances that I would have the controls.” The word was passed to Evans. The two men talked, and Evans came away impressed by what he calls Altman’s “unique vision” for the movie. But Paramount, which had produced the successful *Nashville*, held out for a “box-office” director. Among the directors considered were Mike Nichols and Arthur Penn.

“Everyone they suggested I turned down,” Evans recalls. “I just insisted on Bob. Then I had Robin back me. They had a very important and commercial director who wanted to do it. And I said, ‘I won’t make it with him because I know what the picture will look like before it’s done.’ It’s got to be exciting to make it. I’d rather take a chance on falling on my ass but possibly hitting magic than just make something that’s predictable.” Paramount finally gave in, and Altman was hired.

Evans, by then heavily involved with preparations for *Urban Cowboy*, turned over to Altman and his company, Lion’s Gate, the job of assembling the rest of the cast and filling some key slots. To write the music, for example, several composers had been under consideration from the beginning: Randy Newman, Leonard Cohen, Paul McCartney, even John Lennon. But Altman gravitated toward Harry Nilsson, the iconoclast composer and

The teaming of Evans and Altman seemed as preposterous to them as it did to others. Altman admits, “I don’t like the kind of pictures he makes, the publicity he is associated with.” Evans acknowledges that he didn’t like Altman’s last few pictures.



Producer Robert Evans, writer Jules Feiffer, and director Robert Altman formed a somewhat uneasy alliance.

Melinda Wyckman

singer. “Nobody wanted him at first except Robin,” Altman recalls. “Everyone said, ‘You’ll get in trouble with him. He’ll get drunk, he won’t do it, he’s washed up.’ As a matter of fact, I said all of those things about Harry to Robin myself one day. Then I went home and thought about it and said to myself, That’s what people are saying about me. So I called Harry Nilsson, because I had never met him in my life, and we got along terrifically.”

Then Altman turned to the role of Olive Oyl. Lily Tomlin, the first choice, had by now dropped out; Gilda Radner was being considered, but negotiations had stalled. Altman placed a call to Shelley Duvall, who was in London filming *The Shining* for Stanley Kubrick. He told her he had the role she was born to play. She did not disagree. “Whenever Bob offers me a movie,” Duvall says, “I never even think twice about it. I trust him very much.”

But Paramount needed convincing. Her critical success in *3 Women* notwithstanding, Duvall “couldn’t get herself arrested [in Hollywood],” Altman observes, “except for films I used her in.” He decided on a plan. When Duvall returned from Europe, Altman put her in a recording studio with Harry Nilsson for an afternoon. There she heard for the first time Olive Oyl’s plaintive song, “He Needs Me,” and immediately cut a version of it.

Later Altman, working with Nilsson, dubbed the cut over a Duvall clip from *Thieves Like Us*. (He also dubbed the song “Sweetheaven” over a clip from *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* and “I’m Mean,” sung by the villain Bluto, over a spaghetti Western trailer starring Paul L. Smith, who plays Bluto.) Then Altman threw a little party at his Lion’s Gate studio. Among the guests were Paramount executives and Gulf + Western chairman Charles Bluhdorn. The eve-



Melinda Wyckman

*Sweethaven*, Olive's home and the film's principal setting, was constructed on the rugged coast of Malta.

ning's entertainment included the clips. Nilsson's music went over big; so did Shelley Duvall. "I think," Duvall recalls, "it was Mrs. Bluhdorn who said, 'She looks just like Olive Oyl!'"

**I**t was Altman who decided on Malta, situated in the middle of the Mediterranean, as the place to shoot *Popeye*. Ostensibly, the island was chosen for its congenial climate and the presence of a special effects tank that could accommodate underwater footage. But Malta was also chosen to get away from the press—and from Hollywood. The more money they give you, Altman likes to say, the more they like to stand behind you and watch.

But apprehension about Altman was not confined to the moneymen. Jules Feiffer admired Altman's work, but the director's reputation for improvisation and script repair bothered him. His conversations with Altman about *Popeye* were pleasant enough, but Feiffer felt "vaguely dissatisfied" and wasn't sure he trusted the director. One of the things that an-

noyed him was that Altman seemed less interested in the principal characters than he was in the townsfolk of Sweethaven, who were a marginal presence in Feiffer's original script.

"He talked about them a lot more than he talked about the characters of Popeye and Olive Oyl," says Feiffer. "That's what scared me in the early conversations. Altman said, 'Well, just to shoot the script would be boring.' That bothered me because I didn't think it was boring at all. But it was his movie, and I couldn't start yelling cop until it became clear that he was destroying the script."

When Feiffer first heard Nilsson's music, he got even more agitated. He was convinced that in at least one instance the composer had written lyrics out of character with the screenplay. When Feiffer complained to Altman, there were sparks. "Bob took umbrage with me because I was questioning his ability to handle his work," Feiffer recalls. "He thought Harry was doing a fine job. His feeling was basically that this is an argument not worth having because he can fix anything up when it comes to the

shooting and why worry about it. There were long-distance conversations that boiled over; there were arguments where he would walk out of the room. And when we came to Malta, he, Harry, and I—all of us as it turns out—thought this was going to be impossible."

They arrived in Malta in October 1979 for location planning. Production designer Wolf Kroeger and his crew were just starting to erect the spectacular set, a complete town nestled in a cove. The town would include houses, shops, hotels, a café, a chapel, a sawmill, and even a floating casino, not to mention an array of sheds, barges, tugboats, and boardwalks. Workmen were also building the production complex, which included editing and projection rooms. Artists were putting the finishing touches on a twenty-foot replica of Oxblood Oxheart, the behemoth who fights Popeye in the movie.

But the delicate balance of strong personalities—Evans and Altman and Feiffer and Nilsson—was beginning to seem in danger of collapse. Doubts were rising that everyone could work together. Unexpectedly, the script sessions between

Altman and Feiffer went very well. "Some of the best script sessions I've had since Mike Nichols and I worked together," Feiffer remembers. "Full of ideas while not drowning the characters—enlivening and elucidating. It left me euphoric." For a time a truce reigned. But when Altman began to spend days rehearsing actors playing minor roles, Feiffer became increasingly concerned. Then, in the early days of shooting, when Robin Williams began to improvise with a stream of muttered asides and fractured oaths, Feiffer complained about Williams to Altman, who complained about Feiffer to Evans.

"Since this was Robin's first movie," Feiffer recalls, Altman "simply didn't want to interfere with his creative process. He thought it would throw him for a loop. That wasn't the way he directed, he said. That became a strong difference. I really thought we were at loggerheads. Nonetheless, I saw him soon afterward deep in conversation with Robin. I was quite moved by that: What seemed like a hard line was no longer a hard line. Then Altman said I should speak to Robin myself."

Feiffer met with Robin Williams in private. "Having been involved in this before with actors, when I first got into theater," Feiffer says, "I did not want to whipsaw an actor between the writer and the director, which never helps. My point was that after he arrived at an improvisation, he should start thinking about how to clean it up, dropping lines like, 'You know.'" In a gesture of conciliation, Altman invited Feiffer to join editor Tony Lombardo in the editing room on location and work on whatever scenes worried him, cleaning up the dialogue if necessary.

"That certainly didn't happen on any other film I've worked on," says Feiffer. By March, Feiffer was not only rewriting pages overnight but rewriting the end of *Popeye*. "My sense of it," he says, without rancor, "is that every important fight I lost. In the beginning I was there to keep an eye on things in case Altman deviated suspiciously from the script. I felt like the cop on the production. Then when I felt more and more confident with what he was doing—and where there were changes, I felt they really made a substantial contribution to the work—it became more of a job to try and coordinate the remainder of the script with the atmosphere that was developing on the film." In fact, during shooting, Feiffer remarked that "the movie Altman is mak-

ing is fifty percent me and fifty percent him. But the fifty percent him is to no extent in violation of the Segar world I was trying to construct here, and possibly—there is no way I can tell this—is more in keeping with it."

Robert Evans, then occupied with post-production on *Urban Cowboy*, would fly to Malta for a whirlwind few days at a time. He avoided the set, but showed up at dailies, announcing after a screening that *Popeye* was as "magical" as anything he had ever been associated with. When he saw the first cut, he declared it worthy of three or four hours and gave Altman a bear hug.

Relaxing in the editing room one day, as he advised Tony Lombardo to be "less cutty" in putting together a production reel for U.S. exhibitors, Evans was all

smiles. He observed that his "photographic memory for every frame of film" would be useful during postproduction, an area he called "one of my strengths" as a producer. At the moment, the budget was creeping upward, but he did not seem unduly disturbed. For that matter, according to Evans, neither were the Disney people, who were enthusiastically co-financing *Popeye* in exchange for foreign distribution rights. The relentless pressure came only from Paramount.

"The budget just gets higher and higher," Evans admitted. "It ended up that we—Bob and I—put up our salaries as completion, which was \$13.6 million. We passed that a month ago. If the picture is overscheduled, it's not for lack of preparation. It's for adding nuances that are just going to enrich the picture

## MORK MEETS OLIVE OYL

**R**obin Williams as Popeye the Sailor? At first, even Williams, the television comic famous for his wacky improvisations on "Mork & Mindy," found the prospect daunting. Could he take on the world-renowned cartoon character? Robert Altman thought so. "Casting," he likes to say, "is ninety percent of the creative work."

What that means in practice on an Altman set is that the role is the actor's responsibility. Rare are the moments when director and actor huddle for a discussion of the character's "motivation." Left largely to his own devices, Williams prepared for *Popeye* like a boxer training for a championship match. In fact, he literally worked out with a punching bag. "Just using the punching bag," he recalls, "helped a little for speed, to keep you tight and moving. Popeye's a fast dude—constant, quick movements."

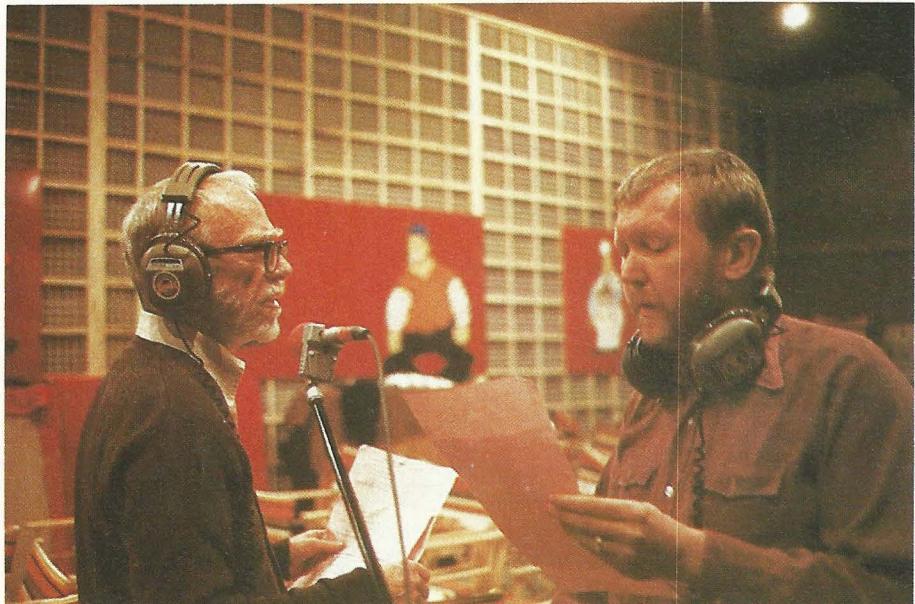
Besides gymnastic training, Williams submitted to tap-dancing lessons, mostly to keep his reflexes in condition. He also watched a number of old *Popeye* cartoons and got some pointers from his friend Christopher Reeve, who had faced a similar challenge with *Superman*. In time, Williams settled into the Popeye characteristics—the half-cocked eye, the raspy voice—and confined his improvisations, he recalls, "within a character, setting certain limits, forcing myself to go deeper."

Like most of Altman's performers, Robin Williams is hard put to recall any advice he got from the director. "Oh, yeah," he finally says, "one thing he did say is quite true—that *Popeye* is a morality play." It's the sort of brief Altman remark that often manages to unlock an actor's creativity. Williams says he began to see *Popeye* as virtually "an Everyman—a very simple man who gets thrust into this very bizarre environment. He's more of a straight man, real grounded and very basic."

If Altman had little to say to Robin Williams about shaping his role, he had even less to say to Shelley Duvall, who plays Popeye's beloved Olive Oyl. Duvall, an Altman veteran, arrived on the *Popeye* set without a clear idea of how she would play Olive Oyl. She was not concerned. "I work from the gut," she explains. "I don't plot it out. I didn't know what Olive Oyl would sound like or talk like or walk like until several weeks after I got there."

As usual, Altman was a model of directorial restraint. "Bob never says much," Duvall says. "It was the same thing on *Thieves Like Us*. I rode to work with him on the first day of shooting. I said, 'Anything you want to tell me?' He said, 'No, you know.' Now that's direction."

While Altman's changeability caught Nilsson off guard and sparked occasional flare-ups, Nilsson's own style, his appetite for spontaneity, was very much like the director's.



Paul Ronald

*Ray Walston runs through one of his numbers with the film's composer, Harry Nilsson.*

all the more. Everyone said in the beginning, 'Oh, God, I don't know how you and Bob Altman are ever going to work together. It's the weirdest combination.' Yet it's as good a combination as I've ever had. I think his main problem in the past has been that he's written, he's directed, he's produced, he's been a businessman and an artist and run a studio on the side. He's just so talented as a director that he should stick to his craft."

**H**ollywood," Feiffer declared one day on the set, "is the studio's universe, and directors love to get away. What any strong director probably cares about most is going off somewhere with his people where he is the central figure and where everybody takes signals from his personality and his desires." So it is with Altman. The Altman experience—as it has been dubbed—can be an ordeal for the noninitiated or, as Alt-

man regular Wayne Robson puts it, it can be a "celebration of life."

It begins with "his people"—the crew and especially the cast. For *Popeye*, the Fellini-esque troupe included Canadian stage actors, off-Broadway actors, the Pickle Family Circus of San Francisco, jugglers and acrobats, Italian stuntmen, an a cappella quartet called the Steinettes, and Altman stock company venerables like Allan Nicholls, making his seventh Altman film, and Robert Forster, the drunk on the ice in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* who plays the town drunk in *Popeye*. The company was encouraged to bring along family and friends, and typically, some were put to work. (Altman's own entourage included his wife, three children, and his one-year-old grandson, who is making his movie debut as Swee'pea.)

One day, Altman gathered the company together and announced that he didn't want three-dimensional characters for *Popeye*. He wanted "silhouettes." He

spent time with each of the fifty performers to develop what he called "pick-a-tic," or selecting a distinctive quirk. "He makes a point of giving even the tiniest part some special moment in the film," explains Paul Dooley, who plays Wimpy. "When people feel they're part of it, they give their all."

"I was afraid that Popeye and Olive Oyl would get lost in the shuffle," Feiffer said in Malta. "But the evidence of the shooting makes me think that what he's doing adds immeasurably to all the things I wanted the film to be—with that sense of orchestration and of things unwinding, casually and accidentally instead of tightly plotted, and with that sense of community." Offcamera, that "sense of community" was cultivated by tournaments of every stripe, especially backgammon (Altman is a backgammon freak); weekend screening of movies—Altman's, cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno's, Alan Rudolph's, Robert Benton's, Disney's; talent shows; and communal viewing of dailies. There was a mimeographed newspaper turned out by Shelley Duvall. There were frequent parties and dinners. "Since we've been here," Paul Dooley said, "I'm sure everybody's been to Bob's house a couple of times for dinner. That doesn't happen on most movies."

Whether in an expansive mood or not, Altman is unusually accessible, on a first-name basis with seemingly everybody. Shuffling in and out of his office, he would call out greetings and questions to passing members of the company. Though Altman stands out because of his appearance—the physical bulk, the silver Vandyke beard, and the characteristically sloppy clothes—he is not a dominating presence.

"What struck me during the first couple of weeks of shooting," Feiffer recalls, "was that I couldn't figure out where his authority came from, because he's not charismatic in any sense of the word. He doesn't order people around. He's very relaxed and reflective on the set, or sometimes tense and concentrated. But whatever his mood, there's nothing bossy about it. He doesn't dominate anybody. He doesn't insult and set up the kinds of games I've heard other directors do—different forms of intimidation. Yet he's clearly in charge. He somehow gets everything he asks for, and I still haven't figured out how it happens, other than the fact that his own character, his own pleasure in what he does, makes people want to live up to his expectations of

*Continued on page 73*

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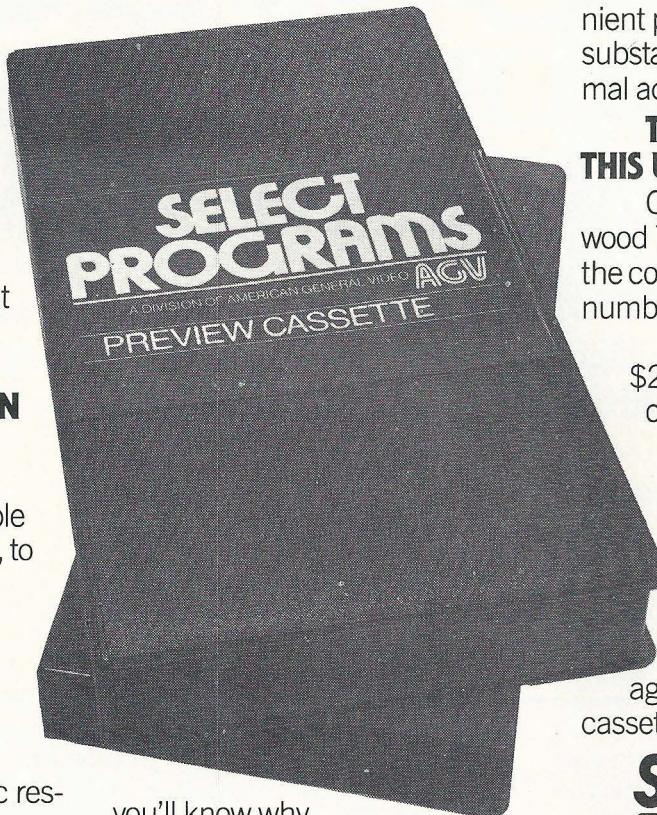
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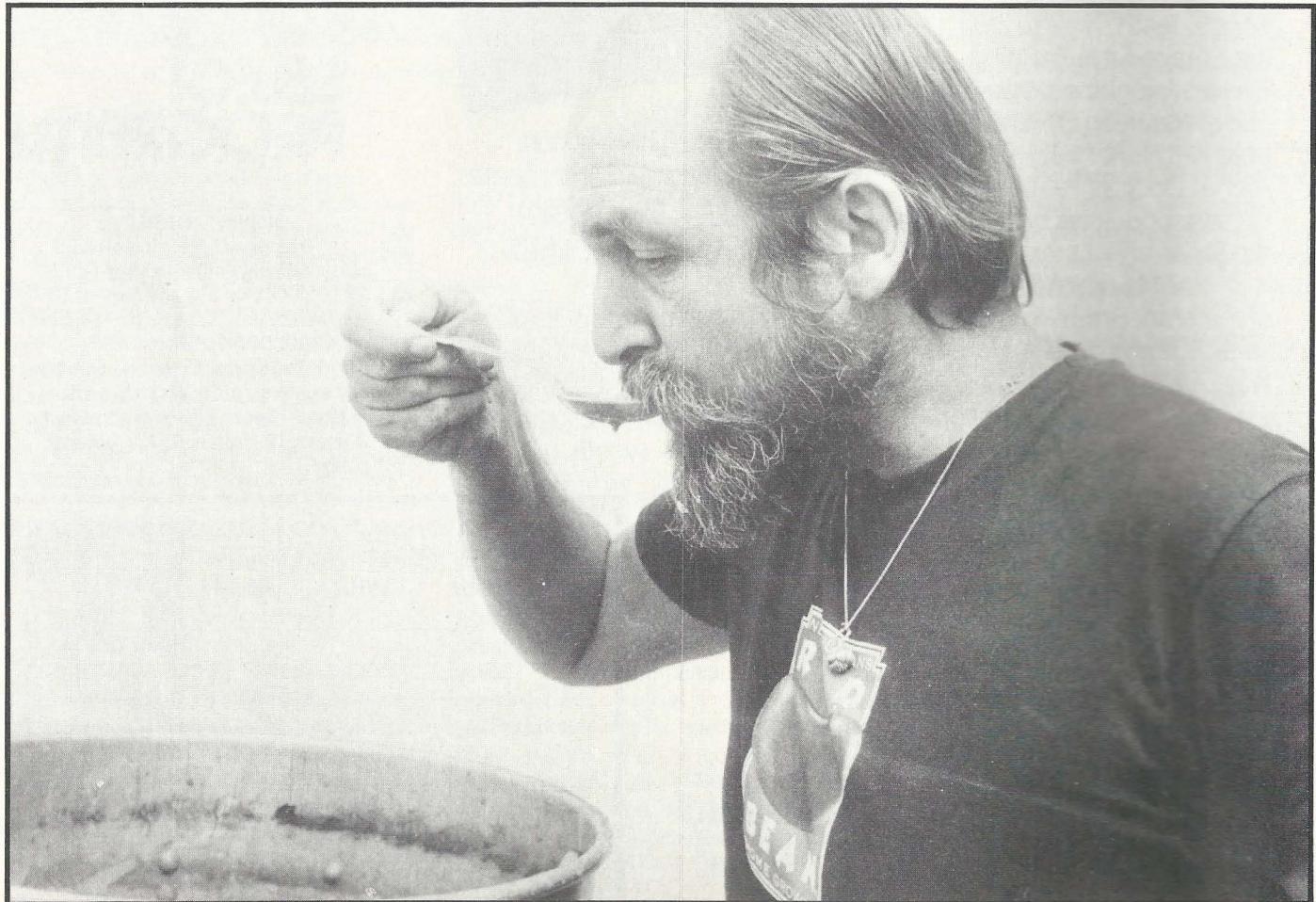
# Garlic AND OTHER ETHNIC PLEASURES

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Filmmaker Les Blank is the down-home poet of regional cultures. His films savor old traditions, strong family ties, local music—and good food. In his latest film, he celebrates the polka.

---

J. Hoberman



Baernd Fraatz

**I**t may be that 1980 will be remembered as the year that the Poles got their due. As I'm writing, the workers of Gdansk have won their strike, a Polish pope heads the Vatican, Zbigniew Brzezinski advises the White House, and Les Blank is editing his movie on Polish-American polka culture. For the last dozen years the forty-four-year-old Blank, who is based in Berkeley, has been seeking out and celebrating indigenous ethnic cultures that have resisted the great Muzak/McDonald's/Madison Avenue bland-out. And if Blank can do for Poles what he's already done for Cajuns, Creoles, and "black Indians" of the Mardi Gras, we may be witnessing the first stirrings of polka chic.

Blank is no ordinary ethnographer. His hand-held, serendipitous travelogues are too quirky and too personal to feign objectivity—they offer a tactile immersion in the culture at hand. A gifted cameraman, Blank claims to shoot in a "trance" state. "I drink a lot of beer," he once explained, "just to obliterate the objective, self-conscious self." Blank's films, most of which run between thirty and fifty minutes, are knitted together with music (rather than narration) and knotted up with longing. He loves to shoot old hand-tinted family photographs or pan across a wall that's covered with yellowing snapshots; he has a knack for setting up scenes with kids romping like puppies at the edge of the frame while a spry and fiercely nostalgic great-grandparent reminisces about the good old days. The key Blank image is the tribal wholeness of a Saturday-night dance where everyone, young and old, is able to get down and boogie to the same primal beat.

A communal feast is as crucial to any of Blank's films as the rendition of "Shall We Gather at the River" is to a John Ford Western. "Chulas Fronteras" settles back as *norteña* singer Lydia Mendoza prepares her Christmas hog's head tamales; the Mardi Gras revelry of "Always for Pleasure" is interrupted for an extended crawfish broil and for rhythm-and-blues star Irma Thomas's recipe for red beans and rice; and "Dry Wood" is an almost continual round of barbecues, expositions on sausage making, and demonstrations of gumbo preparation where Blank gets so close to the action that he's almost using his lens to stir the pot.

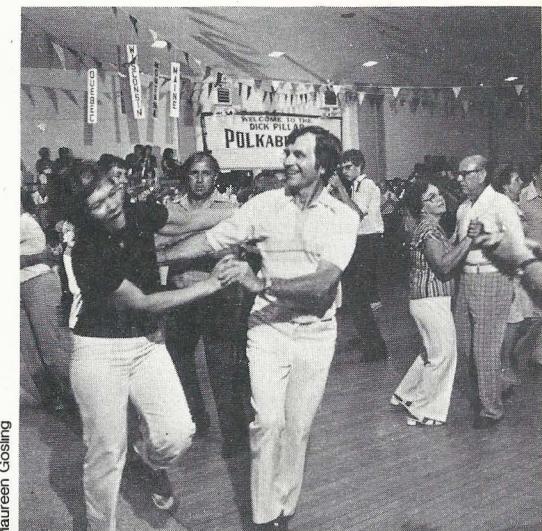
**T**hese are films to make your mouth water, but for all their good-time energy, Blank himself is low-key, almost somber. He admits, "I don't enjoy filmmaking that much.

Shooting is strenuous, equipment breaks down, the costs are high, and dealing with people is a problem." A bearish, soft-spoken man, he has his headquarters on San Pablo Avenue, the wide industrial boulevard that runs along the San Francisco Bay from Oakland to Richmond. It's a nondescript building in a suburban neighborhood, but it's a mecca for folk music enthusiasts. The ground floor houses Down Home Music, one of the best music stores in America, as well as the offices of the folk-oriented Arhoolie label. Chris Strachwitz, Arhoolie's owner, shares many of Blank's interests. He's released some of Blank's sound tracks and produced Blank's Tex-Mex film "Chulas Fronteras."

Blank's studio doubles as the Arhoolie stock room—it's lined with record shelves, cluttered with film cans, and every remaining inch of wall space is plastered with postcards, clippings, Mexican calendars, and promotional posters. Blank offers me a sandwich of soft cheese, chili peppers, and raw garlic, with a can of Point Special beer to wash it down. The snack is redolent of his current interests: Point Special is a local brew he discovered in Wisconsin while working on the polka film ("People say it's the best in the world"), and garlic has been a Blank obsession for the last several years. "I enjoy eating garlic the way I used to enjoy eating candy bars," he maintains.

The recently completed "Garlic Is as Good as Ten Mothers" (the title comes from a Chinese proverb) is Blank's idiosyncratic homage to the pungent herb. A stew of Cajun, flamenco, Mexican, and Italian music, it's the first of several planned "food films" and is filled with informative tidbits (for instance, Eleanor Roosevelt ate three chocolate-covered garlic cloves each day). Despite its evocation of an international garlic culture, the film is very much rooted in Blank's central California base, which is, after all, one of the great garlic-producing areas of the world. Blank documents a garlic harvest in Salinas and a garlic festival in Gilroy. He turns the Bay Area into a community of garlic aficionados, filming scenes in such well-known local restaurants as Chez Panisse, Flint's Bar-B-Que, and Hunam. When he can, Blank shows the film in "AromaRound," which means a pot of garlic butter simmering in the back of the auditorium.

With his twin passions for regional music and ethnic cuisine, Blank is less an ethnographer than he is a pilgrim. His films are not made so much to record—or, some would say, idealize—traditional cul-



Maureen Gosling

For his new film, Blank traveled to New London, Connecticut, for a "polkabration."

tures, as they're made to connect with them. As though acting from some deep inner necessity, Blank is drawn to cultures where family ties remain strong, where food can be the most graphic metaphor for the nourishment that traditions provide, and where music shapes experience into an ongoing, familiar rhythm. "I'm a cultural Peeping Tom," he told one journalist. "I find my own heritage to be...uh...a bit thin."

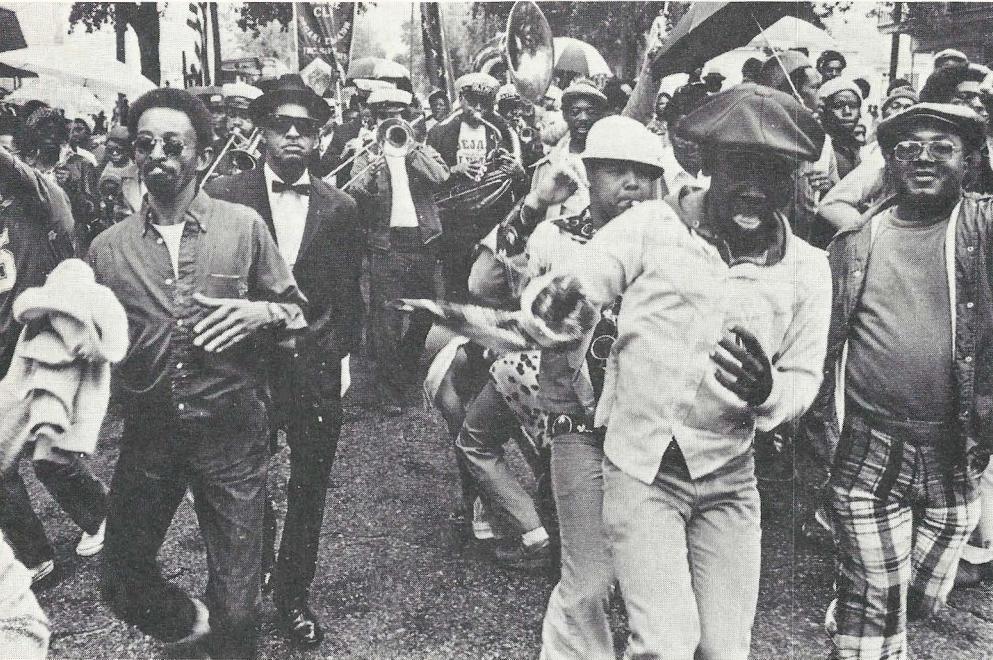
**B**lank grew up in suburban Tampa, Florida, the son of a local realtor. His expulsion from a New England prep school presaged a rocky academic career—dropping out of various colleges to work on a Norwegian freighter, hang around the North Beach beat scene, or enlist in Naval Flight School. Eventually, Blank settled into the communications program at the University of Southern California. (The films he saw there that most impressed him were the experimental shorts "Fingal's Cave" and "Forest Murmurs," montage specialist Slavko Vorkapich's self-described "attempts to make nature dance to music.") Blank began his postgraduate career making promotional and training films, but says that factories "depressed" him—"the sight of all that ungratifying work." In 1967 he started shooting the love-ins in Los Angeles "just for the hell of it." A local television station bought Blank's footage, and from filming the hippies he went in search of other, more traditional folk communities.

"The Blues According to Lightnin' Hopkins," his first regional film, was



Jim Marshall

The sound of ethnic music: above, Mance Lipscomb, the legendary bluesman celebrated in Blank's "A Well-Spent Life." Below, a funeral parade, New Orleans-style, from "Always for Pleasure"; norteña singer Lydia Mendoza in "Chulas Fronteras."



Michael P. Smith



made in 1968. Blank and a sound man spent six weeks trailing the Texas bluesman—a complicated, mercurial personality—through the back streets, barbecues, and black rodeos of Houston. Two years later, Blank returned to east Texas, a bit further north, to the hot plains around Navasota, where he filmed "A Well-Spent Life." His subject was Mance Lipscomb, an unrecorded Saturday-night blues singer until he was "discovered" by folk enthusiasts in 1960. Wholly opposite from Hopkins in temperament, Lipscomb was apparently as unembittered by the harshness of his sharecropper's life as he was unaffected by his belated fame. At one point in the film, he shields his eyes from the sun's glare and tells Blank, "You can live in heaven right here on this earth."

The phrase could be the motto of Blank's subsequent films. After making his bones with the two blues portraits, he went on to depict Louisiana's Cajuns ("Spend It All," 1971) and Creoles ("Dry Wood," 1973); the Creole-Cajun, French-singing bluesman Clifton Chenier ("Hot Pepper," 1973); Chicano *norteña* bands ("Chulas Fronteras," 1976, and "Del Mero Corazon," 1980); and the black "Mardi Gras Indians" of New Orleans ("Always for Pleasure," 1978). In the early seventies, pop star Leon Russell hired Blank to make a film about his musical life-style. The never-released result, *A Poem Is a Naked Person*, is a chaotic feature that, consciously or not, recasts the typical elements of other Blank films in dark, parodic terms.

Given Blank's view that rock 'n' roll is denatured regional music, it's appropriate that a cantankerous analysis of his films was written by *Village Voice* rock critic Robert Christgau, several months after Blank's 1979 Museum of Modern Art retrospective. In his critique of Blank's "folkie nostalgia," Christgau suggested that Blank romanticized his subjects with a sugarcoating of nature mysticism—"I'm sure no bluesman was holding a knife to Blank's throat when he dubbed his production company Flower Films." More fairly, he pointed out Blank's tendency to play down such unpleasant realities as racism, poverty, and the ubiquity of television in the cultures of his subjects. Christgau's polemic minimized the deliberate tensions in Blank's work, as well as his extraordinary ability as a filmmaker to blend into the scenery of other people's lives. Still, there can be little doubt that most of Blank's films are deliberate negations of the industrial world he once documented for a living.

**T**his pastoralism—a venerable tradition in American thought—accounts for Blank's relative ease with rural settings, his preference for Mance Lipscomb over Lightnin' Hopkins. "Always for Pleasure" plows through the organized, orgiastic rituals of the New Orleans Mardi Gras. But more affecting is the homemade backwoods carnival of "Dry Wood," with its costumed Creole revelers riding through the bush on tractors. Blank's best moments convey a sense of down-home, ramshackle poetry: Clifton Chenier jamming with his cousin on a tumbledown porch while hogs root through the yard; a Chicano family getting their "new" 1956 Buick blessed with holy water.

Although all of Blank's previous films have been set around the Southern Rim, the urban, snow-belt Polish culture of his work in progress represents less of a departure than it first appears. For one

Blank's best moments convey a sense of down-home, ramshackle poetry... like a Chicano family getting their "new" 1956 Buick blessed with holy water.

thing, his subjects form a joyful community. "Dancing the polka lifts the spirit," Blank says. For another, there's a background sense of New World possibilities. The polka, he tells me, was brought here by nineteenth-century Czech, German, and Polish immigrants. At the same time, the dance was suppressed in Europe, where it is no longer known.

Blank was first introduced to polka dancing during his 1977 show at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. He researched the field for several years and finally shot the film last summer, using funding from an NEA grant. The movie, he says, will include all of the nation's

top polka performers—"the easiest people I ever worked with, not as paranoid as most musicians." Highlights include the July 4 Polka Fireworks in Pittsburgh; the ten-day Pilar Polkabration, "where people dance from 10:00 A.M. until after midnight" on a Connecticut beach; and a Polish wedding feast in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. The latter event "only lasted one day," Blank adds somewhat wistfully. "They used to go on for three or four."

Blank's working title—"In Heaven There Is No Beer?"—comes from an old polka refrain. Even so, the president of the International Polka Association isn't overpleased with it—he doesn't want people to get the wrong idea about polka dancers. I think it's worth the risk. It's not just that the title acknowledges Blank's particular working methods. The sweet irony of the question mark suggests the whole bemused, stranger-in-paradise quality of his world view as well. ■

J. Hoberman is a film critic for the *Village Voice*.

*The films of Les Blank are available from Flower Films, 10341 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito, California 94530.*

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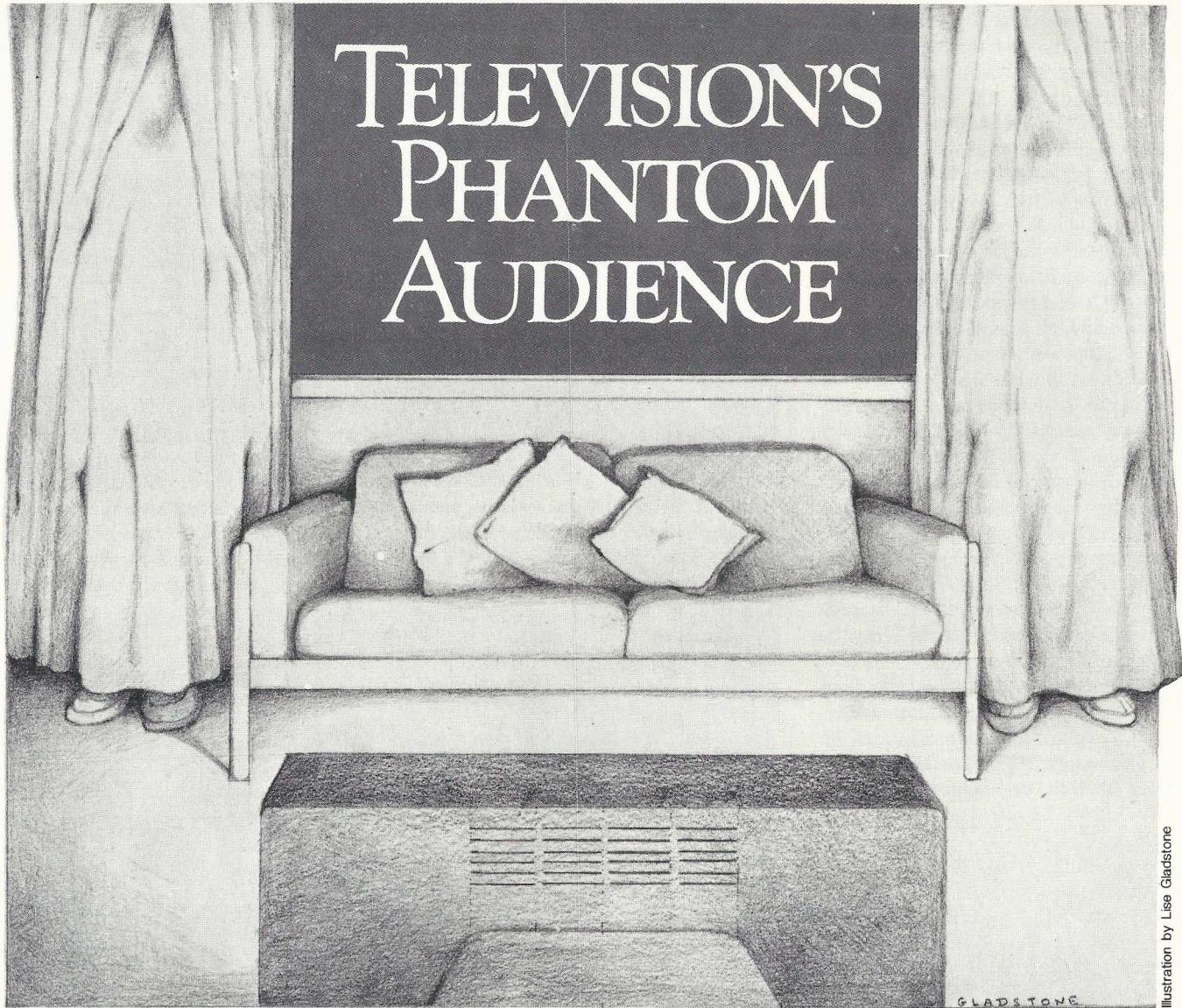
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# TELEVISION'S PHANTOM AUDIENCE



GLADSTONE

Illustration by Lise Gladstone

To network decision makers, viewers exist not in the flesh but as statistics on computer printouts. What effect does this have on programming decisions? For one thing, occasional arrogance.

Robert Sklar

No television producer or network executive has yet earned immortality for a pronouncement about taste, values, or audience judgment the way that movie mogul Harry Cohn gained enduring fame at one of his memorable executive dining room luncheons. Cohn, it may be recalled, disclosed his foolproof method for judging whether a film was good or bad: "If my fanny squirms, it's bad. If my fanny doesn't squirm, it's good. It's as simple as that." Nothing, alas, is quite so simple in the world of television, which not only lacks such earthy, dogmatic captains of industry, but also lacks public relations staffs that know how to exploit the uncouth wisdom of their bosses. The only comparable story concerning sultans of the small

screen is the much-cited report that Fred Silverman, the triple-network man, *likes* television and, at home of a quiet evening, actually might turn on the set. Silverman, so the story implies, has a wondrously unsquirmable fanny.

But Silverman's *Sitzfleisch* is not at issue here so much as the absence of any abiding myths and manifestos about what those who make television think of their own taste and the taste of the viewers, whom they are trying, presumably, to please. Movie lore is rich with such material, and at least it provides grounds for debate. "The public is never wrong," said another mogul, Adolph Zukor, and common sense would suggest this is as hyperbolic as Harry Cohn's claim to infallibility. Sometimes, no doubt, Cohn was a better judge of motion picture quality than a satisfied

theater audience. When it comes to television, however, there are neither fannies nor audiences sufficient to produce a dialogue.

The problem for television, in a word, is that the audience does not exist. No, I don't mean that literally, of course: There are untold tens of millions watching the tube at every minute of the day and night. But it is a phantom audience. It can't be heard, seen, touched, or smelled.

If you walk about a suburban neighborhood on a warm spring evening, the audience's existence can be proved by the many flickering screens glimpsed through billowing curtains or by the sound of laugh tracks wafting on the balmy air. But this isn't the way television people experience their audience. They know the people who watch television as disembodied numbers on computer printouts. The man in the moon is more real to them than the warm bodies hovering around those screens.

This is one of the fundamental differences between the histories of the motion picture and television industries. Movie moguls like Zukor and Cohn had at some point in their careers rubbed shoulders with the consumers of their product. They had stood beside the cashier's cage and counted the tickets sold, lurked in the lobby to watch the faces and listen to the words of their departing patrons. They had begun as showmen, and it was a self-description they cherished. They had put on entertainments that drew people to theaters.

The roots of television's leaders, on the other hand, are found predominantly in the medium itself, or in radio before it, or in the advertising industry. Their origins lie, that is, in broadcasting, in sending their messages out across the ineffable ether, where they scatter and fall like seeds, in many places, in no one place. The people who receive those messages, who invite them into their homes or reject them, are all averages and probabilities. Somewhere out there, twenty-four million people—or forty-eight or ninety-six or one hundred ninety-two million, or all the people in China walking two by two and encircling the globe thirty-seven times—watched a show, but if they liked it, or if all their fannies squirmed, nobody knows.

**T**elevision is the medium of face-to-faceless communication. And, true to their roots, television's decision makers seek the opinion of their phantom public through an even more extreme form of noninteraction, the faceless-to-faceless method of the survey questionnaire. Everyone should have the opportunity to stand in line outside a movie theater in Westwood (the principal cluster of first-run movie houses in Los Angeles) and encounter a television survey person.

"If you saw a program called 'Apple Annie and the Chihuahua' on the television schedule, would you be strongly inclined to watch, moderately inclined, indifferent, moderately disinclined, strongly disinclined?" Your answer is duly marked with a soft dark pencil on graph paper and goes to the computer to determine the career possibilities for, shall we say, a gray-haired old lady and a hairless dog. There are no essay questions on such examinations, no opportunity to suggest that "Henrietta and the Airedale" would be much more to your liking, or perhaps even "Youth Wants To Know" or some other jejune subject. Nevertheless, you will have become a phantom collaborator in making television what it is today.

Admittedly, it's not easy for television's makers to exorcise the ghost and make contact with an audience of, if you'll excuse the expression, real people. Norman Lear cannot knock on your door and take an unobtrusive place in your living room while you watch one of his programs the way any film producer or director, if so inclined, can take a movie theater seat and get unbidden responses to his or her work.

Perhaps television's creative community is persuaded that its phantom public becomes all too intimately palpable on those weekly occasions when "live" studio audiences are gathered for sit-com broadcast tapings. Unfortunately, those studio audiences bear no closer a relationship to the actual home television audience than do Los Angeles bagels to the real thing.

They are composed of people who have fought their way west, across deserts and mountains, to gain access to a sit-com taping ticket. They are primed for pleasure. The mere lifting of an eyebrow throws them into gales of laughter, all recorded for broadcast. They applaud the most mundane sit-com moralisms as if they were hearing Patrick Henry defy the British Crown. Moreover, since children under sixteen are normally excluded, studio audiences can hardly be described as representative of home viewer demographics; sit-com fans do tend to be drawn from that excluded portion of the population not yet eligible to vote, indeed not yet eligible to enter the portals of high school.

There are trends in audience behavior elsewhere in the entertainment world, however, that may mask this unrepresentative quality of studio audiences. For the sad truth is that audiences for legitimate theater, dance, symphony concerts, and opera exhibit some of the same characteristics as the visiting folks in the studio bleachers—they wax ecstatic over the barely adequate and shower with applause the kind of performance that once would have folded in New Haven.

It is as if they are so happy to be in the theater it doesn't matter whether the show is any good or not. I would surmise that this feeling of satisfaction, simply from being among the congregants, has something to do with the declining opportunities for gregarious co-mingling in American society, with the way we have chosen to atomize our lives in home and car, and, not least, with home entertainment. The genial nature of theatrical audiences may stem from the escape such experiences provide—no, not from life's toil and cares but from the predominance in our lives of taking entertainment through electronic images in homebound isolation. In the theatrical audience, you can sense the pleasure of seeing others and being seen, even sense a gratitude that the performers onstage are really alive.

Not all audiences are quite so benevolent, of course. You would think that among the television creative community, the followers of the football Rams or baseball Dodgers would know what it's like to sit in an audience exuding, on the one hand, hostility and, on the other, indifference. Sports fans are becoming more and more adulterous all the time, it's true, no doubt for the same reasons that affect playgoers and balletomanes. But here and there remain the diehards, audiences who are not pleased by definition to be audiences, who require some reason other than mere attendance to be pleased.

**W**hen all is said and done, however, I doubt that television producers make the mistake of assuming their studio audiences respond as a microcosm of the home viewers. I doubt equally that it would help much if Norman Lear or his counterparts were able to achieve invisibility and spend an evening or two observing real television users using television. Something about the television audience makes it fundamentally different from the live studio audience, the theater or concert audience, or even the tens of thousands who fill a sports stadium. Its members count not in the thousands but in the millions, and the difference in degree is also a difference in kind.

Paradoxically, the phantom audience, though unseen and unheard, is felt to have weight, density, mass. It's a ghostly presence in the house of television that registers, nevertheless, on the bathroom scale. Harry Cohn could dismiss the opinion of a few hundred benighted moviegoers who enjoyed themselves down at the Bijou. But the titan's television counterpart can't sit down in a screening room chair without sensing that forty or so million phantoms are crowding around the monitor.

"I usually just get involved in producing ideas that appeal to me," the head of a television production company once told me when I asked him about his attitude toward audience taste and desires. "Not that I'm Everyman. I don't feel so removed from the people who watch television. I don't get to Peoria that often. I trust my instincts—in terms of content and what we're aiming to do."

No legends here for the delectation of future generations—though, of course, the television producer lacked the heady challenge of the screenwriter wits with whom Harry Cohn had parried. At bottom, however, there's the same basic stance taken by the movie mogul: I trust myself, I please myself, there's no other way to instigate or supervise creative work. Yet also expressed is the need to pacify the phantom public: I'm not a ghost myself, to be sure, but I can empathize with you apparitions; I haven't been in your shoes, but I really know something about your condition. Who can afford the arrogance of yesteryear?

If it's impossible to be a Harry Cohn, it's no easier, however, to be an Adolph Zukor. "The public is never wrong," said that judicious mogul; yes, those were more simple days. Who holds such Pollyannish faith today? Well, I suppose the market research people do, the folks with the clipboards out scouting opinions in the movie lines. Their business depends on someone taking seriously the notion that decisions can be made based on a sampling of views on titles which have not yet been scripted or cast, let alone produced.

"You can't find out from an audience what they want to see," said another television production executive about this method. "You have to do something for an audience and see how they respond." Now this is a novel idea. It proposes the producer not as a person asserting superior aesthetic judgment, not as a mirror or conduit of the phantom public taste, but as someone who thinks, creates, makes, and takes a chance.

What if nobody likes what's produced? Well, there's the gamble. The public is sometimes right, and sometimes wrong. The public is capable of many wonderful things, to be sure, but among them is not the production of en-

tertainment programs for television. How the public relates to such products, of course, is as audience—as recipients of works created by professionals at the game. It's up to those professionals to take the lead, make the decisions, take the risks. "Don't give the public what it wants," said a movie theater entrepreneur of the picture palace era. "Give them something better." That is precisely a responsibility too many people in television seem quite willing to forego.

A noted scholar of Japanese culture once wrote a book about the Japanese idea of heroism called *The Nobility of Failure*. Though Japanese technology has conquered American television, such Japanese values have made no impact at all. American television is suffused with failures, in the sense that very few projects make it to broadcast, and of those that do, only a handful manage to gain an audience large enough to survive. Few of those failures, however, came about because the audience rejected something better than it asked for. Of programs that failed, most gave viewers a good deal less than they desired.

**T**he dilemma of commercial network television, in its history so far, has come from its enormous financial success in the midst of such consistent programming failure. No other aspect of the entertainment world enjoys this dubious security, insulated from having to rely on the decisions of individual ticket buyers, to put up the admission price or not. No wonder the television audience is a phantom public, when it has no power of choice in the matter of what it cares to see.

The segmentation of the television audience, if indeed it should take place with the proliferation of cable, satellites, videocassettes, and videodiscs, can only have a salutary effect on transforming that ghostly public into living reality. Even the defection of a small portion of their viewers will make the networks and their producing companies try harder. Of course, they may try harder at providing what they calculate the phantom audience thinks it wants. But I suspect they may also borrow from department store merchandising something akin to the notion of loss leaders—programs that call attention because of their exceptional value.

The opportunity for the viewing public to exercise a little discretion may put an end to the multiple binds that constrict television's makers right now in their attitude toward their audience. That attitude is: The audience is unknowable, and even if it were knowable, it would not know its own wants, but we must try to intuit those wants and not go beyond them.

If and when the phantom public becomes visible, it will likely appear as many audiences rather than one. The idea of many audiences may make it easier for producers to cast off the yoke of the invisible monolith and take the risk of pleasing only some, or maybe none. The audience—the multiple audiences—will not grow accustomed all at once to something better than what they think they want. In television, as elsewhere, the road to noble success will probably first be paved with noble failures. ■

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Robert Sklar is director of cinema studies at New York University. His latest book is *Prime-Time America*, a collection of essays on television.



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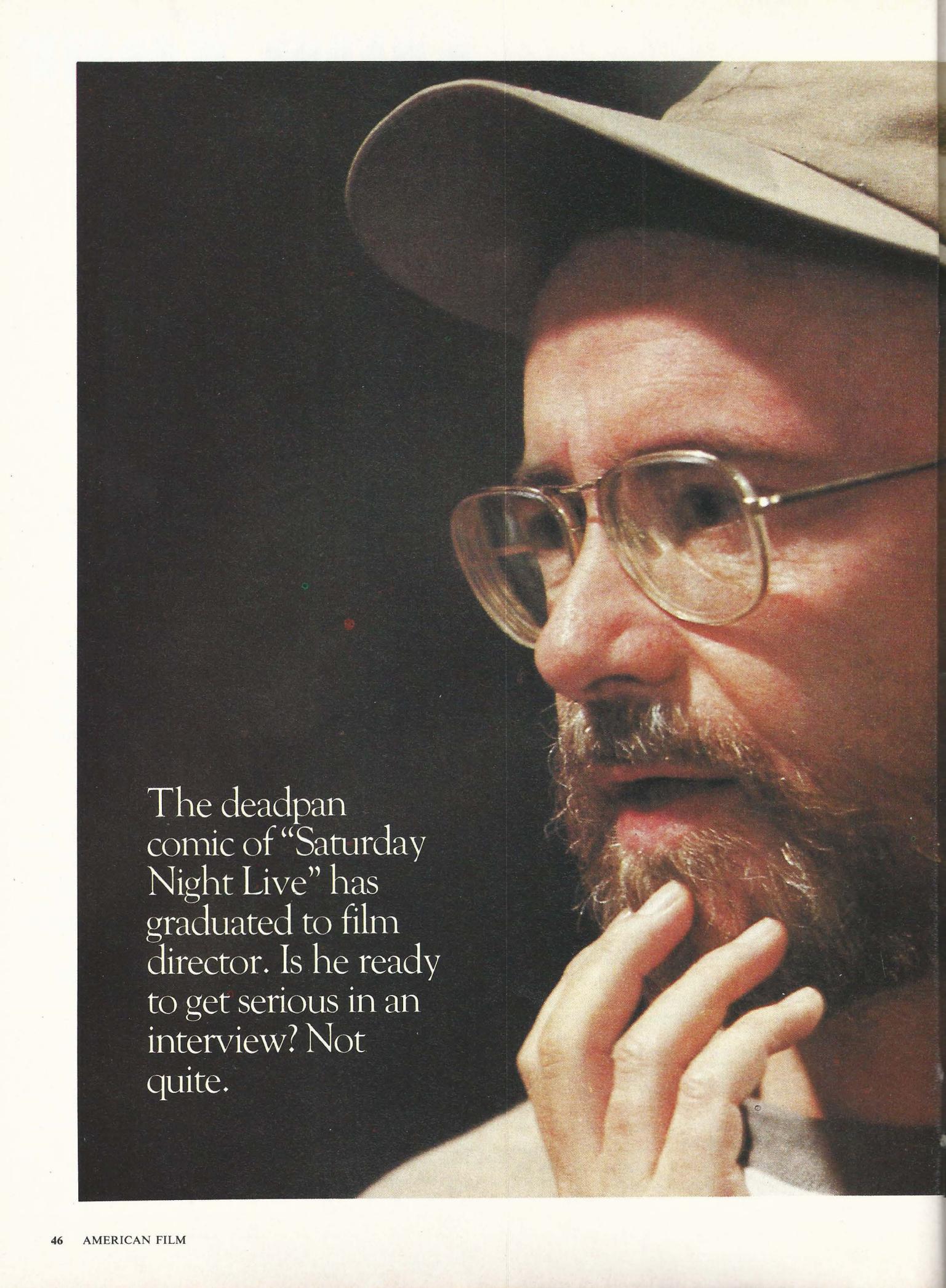
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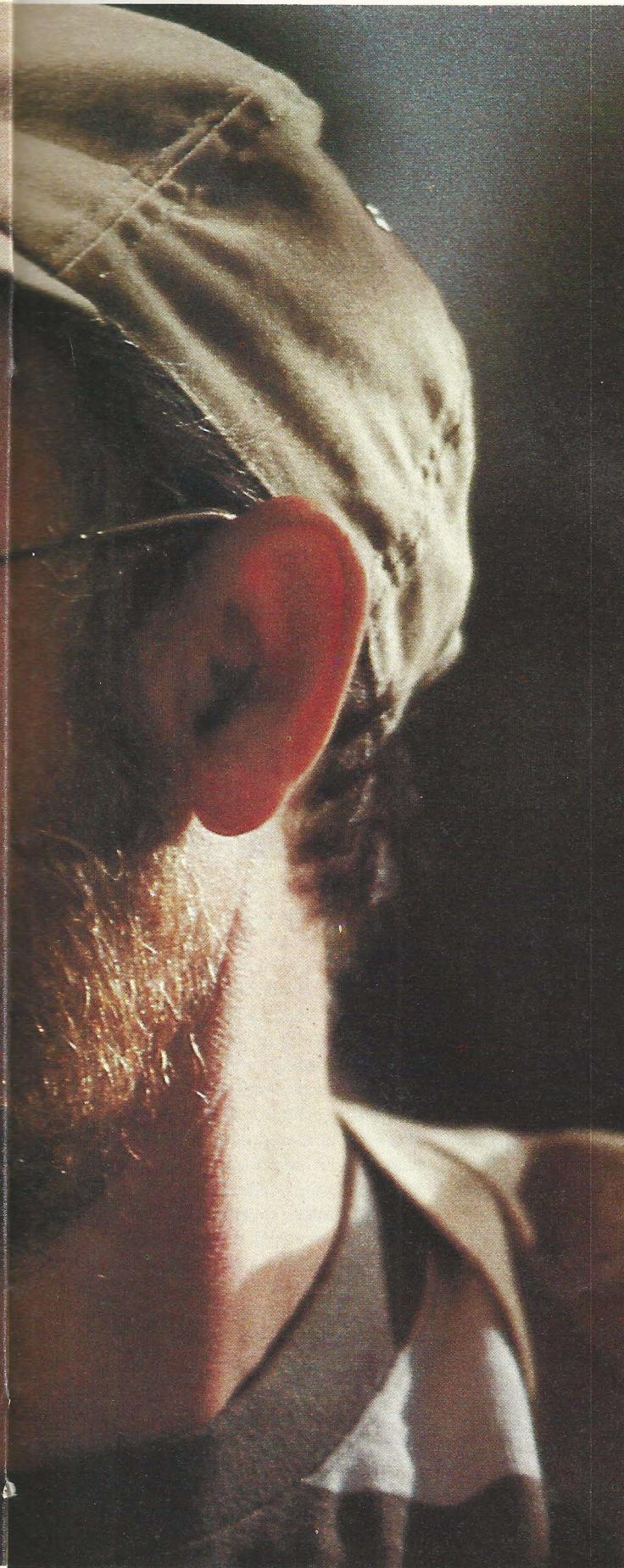
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The deadpan  
comic of "Saturday  
Night Live" has  
graduated to film  
director. Is he ready  
to get serious in an  
interview? Not  
quite.



# BUCK HENRY GETS CAGEY

Jon S. Denny

**I**n the early sixties, when Buck Henry was a young writer and actor, he shared an apartment, on New York City's Lower East Side, with a friend named George Manos. The apartment was a modest walk-up, but it featured a large window facing the street. On a chair by the window, Henry placed a life-size mannequin dressed in a fancy gray suit and holding a pipe. For several months, the mannequin sat vigil over the neighborhood. But one evening when Manos was out, Henry decided to change places with the dummy. He put on the gray suit, took pipe in hand, and sat in the chair, in the dark, drawing quiet breaths.

Several hours later, Manos returned, switched on the lights, and went about his business. Henry waited for the precise moment. Finally, he stirred a bit in the chair. Manos caught the movement out of the corner of his eye. Then Henry jerked his arm and dropped the pipe on the floor. Manos did a double take, shot toward the door, and stumbled down the stairs and into the street. He turned and looked up. Henry, still posing as the mannequin, sat by the window motionless, but smiling with his eyes. It was the last time anyone ever saw him in a suit.

"Actually," Buck Henry is saying, freewheeling from mannequins to mortuaries, "I plan to be stuffed like Trigger. I think it's not only a space saver, but it's something that can be practical in the decorative art category. To have your friends and your relatives sitting around the house long after they're capable of contributing to the life of the party would be an admirable idea."

Henry, almost smiling, is sitting somewhat uneasily on the edge of a plastic chair inside his small office on the Warner Bros. lot in Burbank. The office lacks a sense of permanence, looking as if it was meant to last only until the thumbtacks are yanked from the pictures on the wall. In fact, it was meant to last until Buck Henry has completed filming *First Family*, a political satire starring Bob Newhart, Gilda Radner, and Madeline Kahn. (It is scheduled to open this month.) Henry wrote and directed the film himself, and that marks a new step in a crowded career.

So far Buck Henry has been, at various times, a comic, screenwriter (*The Graduate*), film actor, television host ("Saturday Night Live"), co-director (*Heaven Can Wait*), practical joker, and deadpan bon vivant. But making his solo directing debut has not put him in an expansive mood toward the press.

He is wary. He peers at the interviewer through silver-rimmed glasses, his thin eyebrows and lean lips forming



On the set of *First Family*, Buck Henry gives direction to Bob Newhart and a bowl of fruit.

a neat, blank expression. He hardly moves, except for an occasional plunge into a pocket for a stick of chewing gum. Even when a roast beef sandwich arrives, he consumes it with quick and efficient bites. He is not a man of wasted motion. In a flat, slow voice, he is talking about his favorite subject: why he doesn't talk more often with the press.

"Your work should be the target," he says. "The more you make yourself the issue, the more you let be known how you live and what you think about, the more it puts the emphasis on the wrong stuff. Since the New Journalism was semi-invented by its semipractitioners, the popular press has become a place to cut down to size the people who have gotten too big. The back page of *People* magazine is designed to get people in trouble for something they've said, whether or not it's in context. I am not shy about the press. I'm just cagey."

He talks in a low-pitched monotone,

so that there can be no trace of inflection to misconstrue. His answers often consist of just a few words, and he likes one-word replies to questions that cross the border into the "personal." "If I do get asked personal questions, I'll just lie to make it more interesting," he says. "I have no compunction about that at all."

Buck Henry's wariness toward interviewers was reinforced by a Kenneth Tynan piece on Mel Brooks that appeared in the *New Yorker* several years ago. "In a terrific drunken moment," Henry says, "he told me that he was inventing a feud between Mel and me, and I didn't understand. [Brooks and Henry together created the "Get Smart" television series.] He was trying to tell me up front that he was going to do this, and he did it. It was unconscionable. At the *New Yorker*, apparently, they told him his article was too friendly, too nice. So he got us into a wrangle which shouldn't have been. It's always 'yesterday's news,'

and no one remembers or is interested, except Mel and me."

During the eight months of production for *First Family*, Buck Henry gave no interviews and the set was closed. But at the suggestion of Daniel Melnick, the film's executive producer, Henry is attempting to take a more benign attitude toward the press. "Buck's aversion to the press is similar to mine," Melnick says. "It's simply embarrassing: You always come off sounding so self-serving, and you cringe. Or you say things that are so outrageous that people get enraged. Buck is so sensitive to all the bull surrounding being a celebrity. You can easily construct the classic Hollywood interview. It's like Elaine May's wonderful thing about 'Al Schweitzer, wonderful fellow, I never went out with him myself.' " Buck Henry puts it more solemnly. "Interviews are all nails in one's coffin. It's just one more weapon for those who are out to get you."

**I**ntroducing Buck Henry on "The Tonight Show," Johnny Carson once described him as "a man of many things. You name it. Henry is a writer, performer, director, very good friend, sincere, an old Norge, a snappy dresser." The eclectic Buck Henry was born Buck Henry Zuckerman fifty years ago, son of an Air Force general and a Mack Sennett bathing beauty. After attending a series of private schools and Dartmouth College, Henry was drafted during the Korean War and toured Germany in the Seventh Army Repertory Company. He wrote and directed a musical comedy, which he also starred in.

After the war and six or seven years of rejection slips as a writer, Henry gained his first national attention by forming, with the prankster Alan Abel, the Society for Indecency to Naked Animals, or SINA.

Posing as founder G. Clifford Prout, Henry paraded around the country with picket signs and slogans, and appeared on all the network talk shows, railing against the moral decline of America as evidenced through the exposure of unclothed beasts. Not too many knew whether to take SINA seriously or with a knowing grin. ("Buck Henry," says Mike Nichols, "is the funniest and most serious guy I've ever met—simultaneously.") Henry appeared in parks and zoos, and once tried to put very large Fruit of the Loom shorts on a baby elephant. It didn't work. SINA reached its apex when Henry was interviewed on the "CBS Evening News." Later, anchorman Walter Cronkite became incensed when he learned it was all a hoax. "We never, ever, intended to fool Uncle Walter," Henry declares. "It just happened that way."

In the early sixties, Henry joined the Premise, an off-Broadway improvisational group that included George Segal. After six months, Henry began writing for the Steve Allen television show and also for "That Was the Week That Was," a program that better utilized Henry's flair and feel for the satiric. In 1964 Henry with Mel Brooks created the James Bond television spoof called "Get Smart." Henry served as story editor for the first two years, and developed such memorable characters as the huge, stupid dog that feigned heart attacks to avoid spying assignments and Hymie, the robot secret agent that often got punched in the stomach for no particular reason. Henry also created a short-lived series called "Cap-

Henry's first try at a screenplay, for a movie called *The Troublemaker*, failed, he believes, "because the world wasn't really waiting for the definitive attack on the cabaret-licensing system in New York City."

tain Nice." "It was about a highly reluctant superhero with a harridan mother," he says, "and one of the major critics accused it of being a homosexual plot to take over America."

His first try at a screenplay, written in 1961, was for a movie called *The Troublemaker*. It failed, Henry believes, "because the world wasn't really waiting for the final definitive attack on the cabaret-licensing system in New York City." His breakthrough in films came in 1967 with the screenplay for *The Graduate* (for which he received all of \$35,000). It became one of the most profitable pictures ever made. It placed an Oscar on director Mike Nichols's mantle, turned a beaky unknown actor named Dustin Hoffman into box-office gold, zoomed Alfa Romeo car sales by two hundred percent, and made Buck Henry the hottest screenwriter in America. It was the film that included a line that has become a classic for an entire generation: "Ben, I want to say one word to you, just one word. . . . Plastics."

Since *The Graduate*, Henry has worked on screenplays for such films as *Candy*, *The Owl and the Pussycat*, *Catch-22*, *What's Up, Doc?*, *Day of the Dolphin*, and *Heaven Can Wait* (with Warren Beatty). He is a writer first and foremost, and one of the finest adapters of original material. "The pictures I've written or been involved in range from G-rated to X," he says, "and no one could guess from a vacuum that one person wrote them all. They were adaptations of very different styles, attitudes, and rhythms. I tried to maintain the flavor of the originals. Of course, there's more of me in *First Family* than anything else because it's not an adaptation. It's my own observation of things."

"To say someone is just an adapter," says Theodore Flicker, founder of the Premise and director of the ill-fated *Troublemaker*, "is exactly like saying Shakespeare was just an adapter of Holinshed. It's all wrong." The adaptive process is also a long and tedious one (the first draft of *Catch-22* was over three hundred

*Gilda Radner and Madeline Kahn in a torrid bedroom scene in First Family.*





Henry with his co-director, co-writer, co-star Warren Beatty in *Heaven Can Wait*.

pages and would have taken up to six hours of film). "There are two kinds of ego," says Henry. "One's the ego of self-centeredness and egomania, and the other is the kind of ego that gives you enough security not to be constantly concerned with what other people say about you. The latter is the more advantageous one. It is best expressed in being able to enjoy what you judge as your own success. When you know you've done something well, or funny, or interesting, that's a reward."

Buck Henry continues, "Most writers feel the same way I do. There's a feeling about finishing a script that is like almost nothing else in life. Putting an end on something is just an incredible, incredible feeling. There are writers who enjoy the process more than finishing, which I wish I shared. I don't. I find the process painful, but it's worthwhile to get to the end of it. Finishing a script has its own rush. Still, I really do think I'll outlive all of my work. A half-life of celluloid is hardly a half-life of uranium. I don't think anybody will remember my work or my name, and I don't think that's necessarily bad."

**T**he SOB has no ego at all or he has the biggest one in the world. He is either the most venal, ambitious person or he just goes with the flow. I don't know. You have to be on your toes with Buck Henry."

George Segal is talking over long-distance telephone. "We were in Paris together once, and we got an astrological readout. It said that guys who wear Mickey Mouse T-shirts do things other people don't do. Buck Henry is an astrological phenomenon: He wears that white Mickey shirt and the baseball cap. He has an egoless disregard for what we expect as median behavior. He executes his ideas everywhere. Your only move is to look foolish. We were walking toward the commissary one day and noticed Joanne Woodward standing by herself. Buck immediately got down on all fours, scampered up to her, and looked under her dress. He was very doglike; he panted and everything. The amazing thing was that he was very decorous, even on all fours."

George Segal continues, "We've gone to Morocco, Marakesh, Mexico. In Buck's eyes, I'm rather slothy. I like to sit by the pool. But Buck researches places. He absorbs information. He always hired a guide with a pencil-thin mustache who dragged him around and pointed things out." Henry is a great observer and writes, says Segal, from his own experience. "I remember that once a friend was sent down to Dartmouth to deliver a letter to Henry, and the guy reported walking into Buck's room and finding it completely empty, except for a chain and a rubber tire suspended from the middle of the ceiling. Inside the tire was Buck, totally naked and reading a book. Several

years later, I'm reading the screenplay for *The Owl and the Pussycat*, and I come across a scene where I say to the super, who's a big, burly, hairy type, 'I'm going up to work on my typewriter. You can go sit in your tire.' Now at first I thought that was a pretty funny gorilla joke. Then I remembered the tire at Dartmouth. I realized then that Buck wrote autobiographical jokes."

Segal was the instigator of an elaborate practical joke on Buck Henry several years ago. One night Henry was having dinner at Segal's home and complained about the food. So the next time he was invited, he was served a chicken made out of rubber. That was only the beginning. For the next couple of years, in restaurants virtually all over the world, whether Segal was present or not, Buck Henry's dinner would sometimes arrive as a splendid covered dish containing a ravaged-looking and scrawny rubber chicken. "Segal, like most actors," Henry said at the time, "has a tiny childish mind and a tiny childish sense of humor. This absurd prank amuses him, so I pretend not to notice. Also, I find as the years go by I seem to have an increasing appetite for rubber chickens." Segal says he asked the cameraman who shot *First Family* what he thought of Buck Henry. The cameraman paused and said Buck Henry read too much.

**C**ontrary to Hollywood legend, there are certain things that Buck Henry just will not do. "I will not chart ahead. Ten minutes is too long ahead," he says. "I will never take a meeting. I've taken a headache, and I will consent to have a meeting, but I will never take one. I will not incompt. I will not ankle. I refuse to sky in one direction or the other. Or wing. I will not wing." There are certain things Buck Henry would like to do. "I'd like to lead a great symphony orchestra," he says. "I'd like to make an important contribution to scientific research. I'd like to discover a vaccine of some kind, or perhaps start a major religious movement. I could think of lots of things, but I quit all of those things so I could do what I'm doing."

What Henry does do, among other things, is appear in virtually every movie he writes. He was the hotel desk clerk in *The Graduate*, Lt. Col. Korn in *Catch-22*, a strait-jacketed lunatic in *Candy*, an emissary from God in *Heaven Can Wait*, and he is a bearded and a non-

bearded cameo character in *First Family*. He has also appeared in pictures he hasn't written, such as *Old Boyfriends*, playing a man in search of a light for his smoke, and *Gloria*, where he is a marked man who gets murdered.

But it has been Buck Henry's appearances on television—on "The Tonight Show" and "Saturday Night Live"—that have established his "personality." On "Saturday Night Live," Henry has played everything from a sexually repressed middle-aged single father to a sexually deviant middle-aged baby-sitter to a middle-aged English lord with a vulgar last name. The ratings when he has been host of the show—and he has been host a record eleven times—indicate that there is a surprisingly wide audience for Henry's off-beat characterizations.

"There's a hard core of people who clearly understand what he's about," says Lorne Michaels, the program's original producer. "He does have marquee value within a certain community. I think people find him difficult to define at times because he has an extraordinary amount of talent and because he doesn't do one thing over and over." Michaels adds, "He knows how this show is done, and he fits in perfectly. He knows when to panic.

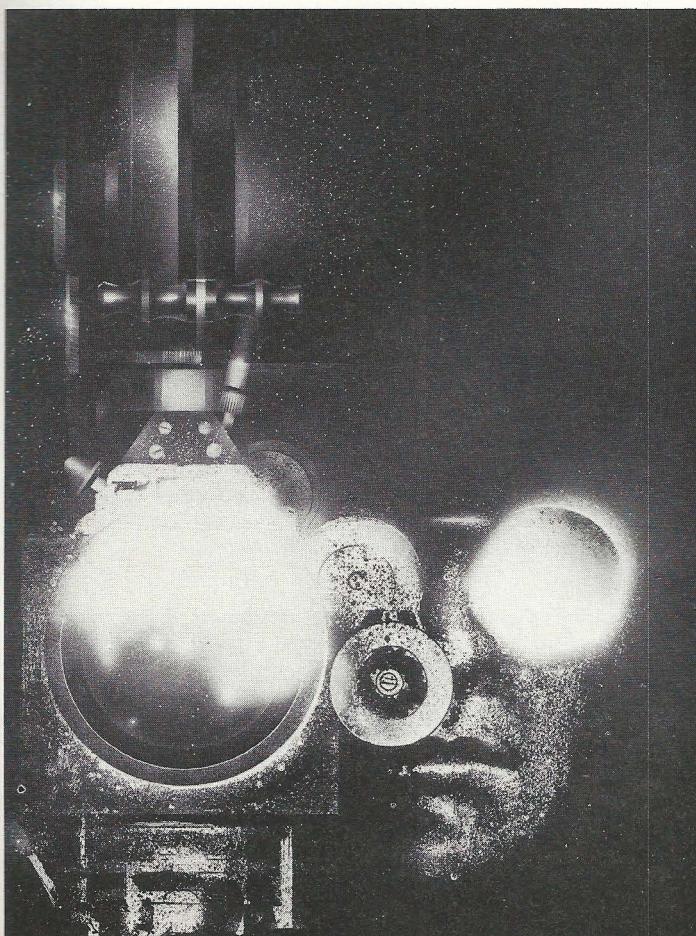
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"I think people perceive of me as a weird, sardonic, twisted, strange person. And I don't think it's quite a totally fair definition. But it's a piece of me."

He understands that there's no sense panicking on a Monday. The level of hysteria when Buck hosts the show is almost completely diminished, almost to the point where people take him for granted."

On the surface, Buck Henry appears to be an unlikely cult hero among the young viewers of "Saturday Night Live." His dry wit in monologues and his total distaste for gags are accompanied by a penchant for loose cardigan sweaters, sneakers, and very large pockets. Occasionally, Henry has shown up wearing army fatigues and an army cap. On the screen, Henry appears studious and always serious. Of course, he isn't playing a role. Michaels says, "There isn't a serious part of Henry trying to get out. It's already out."

One of Henry's best-known and least-endearing characters on "Saturday Night Live" has been Mr. Deleuca, a middle-aged father reverting to adolescence who is often seen lustng after Jane Curtin in housedress. "I play mentally crippled characters, and I love teasing and fiddling with the taboos," says Henry. "Buck is one of those off, weird guys," says Al Franken, who has been a writer and performer on the show. "There's a lot of lech in Buck. He has a writer's sense of humor, and we entertain each other. If it's dreadfully unfunny in a meeting, he'll laugh at it for that reason. He's one of the few people around who makes everybody happy—and he loves playing Uncle Roy." Uncle Roy, another "Saturday Night Live" character, is a baby-



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sitter who plays corrupt little games with two girls and takes photos in the process.

On the slightly more prissy Carson program, Buck Henry gets to play a character that is at least more of his genuine self. Carson recently described him as a "middle-aged elf," but Buck Henry comes off more like a strange amalgam of Wally Cox, Carl Sagan, and the man next door the neighbors never see. He never angles for the chuckle, and he looks like a man who, if not totally comfortable in the polyester television environment, knows very well that he doesn't have to do this for a living. And he doesn't.

"The trick for me on the Carson show is to lay back and not outperform myself," says Henry. "People go on that show and get all hot and crazy and nervous, and it makes me uncomfortable. The other trick is to make my mind a blank, like you do when you're improvising well. It's the only interview show I do, and it's a different kind of game. I get the feeling that I'm playing a role, fitting a slot. It is a game, though; it keeps me in practice, sort of. You just can't take taxis and limousines or you forget what the streets are like. You've got to take a bus and subway now and then. I think that's what Carson's like."

Rarely will he watch himself when the show airs. "I get really twitchy when I see my image," he says flatly. "It's nothing specific. I just don't like watching." He waits for something more to say. "I see somebody who looks enough like me to make me uneasy. I wish I saw somebody else, but I see me. And I'm always surprised to see that I look like me and certainly surprised to hear my voice. I find it very unpleasant. I can imagine that people who know me from the Carson show alone think of me in a strange, cocked way. Like a kind of American Lucien Freud. No, that's wrong, too. I think people perceive of me as a weird, sardonic, twisted, strange person. And I don't think it's quite a totally fair definition. But it's a piece of me."

**D**espite his television appearances, Buck Henry insists he is devoted to anonymity. He finds that his growing celebrity has become an unwanted part of his life. He likes success as much as any other man, he says, but does not court it with quite the same fervor. He despises the trappings. "Other people really have a good time being stared at," he says. "I have

a good time staring at other people. Milos Forman once told me a story about Charlie Chaplin. They were walking down the street in New York, and Chaplin seemed to be deeply depressed. Finally, someone said 'Charlie Chaplin!' and he changed from a depressed little man to the king of the world. It's true about a lot of people. They need that jolt of anonymous love. I don't need it. It makes me very self-conscious because I know—another cliché coming up—that they're dealing with somebody they've manufactured. I'm some other person. So there are three of us standing up there."

Buck Henry tries to refine his self-portrait. "The point is, my life is not my work," he says. "I spent a long time designing my life trying to establish an atmosphere in which I could have the best possible time. I'm very happy wandering around and going to movies and plays and seeing people." He knows that some people lump him in the same category as Woody Allen, but he calls the comparison absurd. They both share a need for glasses, an occasional harried look, and a reasonably equal contempt for public focus, but the comparisons, says Henry, should end there.

*Continued on page 61*

## CALL FOR ENTRIES FOR THE USA FILM FESTIVAL/ ROCKWELL INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM COMPETITION

35mm & 16mm Competition in Animated, Dramatic  
Documentary and Experimental Films

Entry Deadline: February 1, 1981

The USA Film Festival/Rockwell International Short Film Competition was begun in order to recognize excellence and exceptional creativity on the part of the USA's independent and student filmmakers. In addition to the cash awards, the final selection of films will be shown on April 3, 1981 during the 11th Annual USA Film Festival, March 27 - April 5, 1981 in Dallas.

### JUDGING

Films are judged on their originality in lighting, cinematography, concept, execution, script and use of new elements.

Films of a primarily didactic or instructional nature are not acceptable, nor are films specifically designed to promote a product unless they have other true entertainment or enrichment value.

A film will not be considered for competition if it uses non-cleared, copyrighted music or inserts from other, copyrighted films.

### COMPETITION PROCEDURE

All entries will be pre-screened by Short Film Selecting Critic Dr. Barbara Bryant and a screening panel of experts in the industry (Gina Blumenfeld, N.Y.; John Canemaker, N.Y.; Barbara Ortiz, Fla.; Charles Samu, N.Y.; Marjorie L. Sigley, England; Thom Tyson, Cal.). Their final selections will constitute the four hours of programming to be shown on the Festival's Short Film Day, April 3rd. A separate panel of industry experts will then screen the final selection of films to determine the recipients of cash awards.

### ELIGIBILITY

The USA Film Festival/Rockwell International Short Film Competition is open to all new 35mm and 16mm optical sound track films under 50 minutes and primarily USA-made in terms of cast and crew. Entry films may be submitted by the filmmaker, producer or distributor. All entries must have been completed since May 1, 1980.

For entry forms or further information, write to:

THE USA FILM FESTIVAL • P.O. Box 3105, S.M.U. • Dallas, Texas 75275 • or call (214) 692-2979

Attend the 11th Annual USA Film Festival in Dallas March 27 - April 5, 1981

# Dialogue on Film

## Ned Beatty

*An inquiry into the arts and crafts of filmmaking through interview seminars between Fellows and prominent filmmakers held at Greystone, under the auspices of the American Film Institute's Center for Advanced Film Studies.*



**N**ed Beatty's face may be more familiar than his name, but his talent does not go unrecognized. As one of the busiest and most highly regarded character actors around, Beatty has appeared in such prominent films as *Deliverance*, *Nashville*, *Superman, 1941*, and *Network*—for which he was nominated for an Academy Award. He has also played in numerous television series and movies made for television like *The Execution of Private Slovik* and *All God's Children*. That's not bad for an actor who has been in film for only nine years.

Beatty's roles may not be the leading ones, but they are always refreshingly diverse. In *Nashville* he plays a local wheeler-dealer insensitive to his children's deafness; in *Network* Beatty makes his mark as the fiery and powerful chairman of the board; in *Superman* he plays Lex Luthor's dim-witted assistant, who scurries through the sewers of the city; and in *Promises in the Dark* Beatty portrays the heartbroken father of a dying teenager.

Recently, Beatty has received notice for his sharply etched characterizations of a "street-preaching charlatan" in *Wise Blood* and, in *Friendly Fire*, a confused and angry midwestern father who has lost a son in Vietnam. Charles Champlin calls Beatty "a kind of all-purpose American archetype, working good and evil and on both sides of the blue-collar line."

But it's in his southern roles that Beatty often seems to draw his richest

characterizations. One reason may be his southern roots. He was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1937. The son of a traveling salesman—Beatty thinks his father would have been happier as a preacher—he won a music scholarship to a nearby church-affiliated college, where he sang in the choir. But after only a year he left and, almost by accident, tried out for a small choral part in a summer theater production. Beatty got the part, he says, because "I could speak the loudest." (At the time, he admits, he didn't even know what an actor did.)

From there he went on to such meaty stage roles as Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. Beatty was a veteran performer—and thirty-four years old—when Hollywood casting director Lynn Stalmaster saw him at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., and recommended him for a part in *Deliverance*. Originally the film was to feature four unknowns as the white water canoeists, but the producers got nervous and brought in stars Burt Reynolds and Jon Voight. Beatty and Ronnie Cox survived the cut.

Beatty's latest films are *Hopscoch* and *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*, which is due to be released next year. In the Dialogue, Beatty discusses the differences between film and the theater, what it's like to work with directors Robert Altman, John Huston, and John Boorman, and why he believes that people in the film industry need to reorder their thinking.

# Dialogue on Film

**Ned Beatty:** I feel like sharing several impressions with you which, I suspect, come out of having seen *Nashville* this afternoon. The first impression I would like to share is: That doggone film blew me away. It's the first time I'd ever seen it in its entirety. I had seen it in rough cut before the final sound editing had been done, but the film is somewhat different than that version. I also think there must be something about the span of years that gave it a particular impact. It hit me on many levels, personal and otherwise.

The second impression is the thing that I most want to talk about. I have very strong sentiments against the idea of any one person being able to put together a film or leave his mark strongly on it. I have always been a firm believer that the reality is a group effort. I have found almost all forms of dramatic presentation to be that way. I thought *Nashville* would be indicative of how many people had put in their two cents' worth. After having seen it, I'm again incredibly impressed by Mr. Altman. I came out of the experience of working with him not having any particular feeling about what contribution he had made. I sort of knew what some of the rest of us had done. But since I've seen it again, all of a sudden I can see him up there. And it turned me around.

**Question:** How much improvisation was there on *Nashville*?

**Beatty:** It was all improvisational. Now by that I mean we never went into a scene to say lines that had been written down. So in that particular case—and I must tell you in many cases—the script served more as a scenario.

*The versatile Ned Beatty: a dim-witted henchman, with Gene Hackman, in Superman; a singing street preacher, with William Hickey, in Wise Blood.*



What I'm trying to suggest is that Altman goes all the way with this process.

**Question:** So that line of yours "I'm going to stay after him just like a rodent" was improvised?

**Beatty:** Well, the problem was that I was supposed to be the local guy with all the connections. And I wasn't coming through that much. So in my own way, the job was to tell Michael Murphy, "I'm going to take care of this." And the line, "I'm going to stick on him like a rodent," just came from wherever those kinds of things come from. I thought it was quite good myself. I take improvisation very seriously, and I wanted to make very specific story points when I was on camera. I feel good about the performance from that point of view.

**Question:** In *Network*, did you improvise that wonderful two-minute speech?

**Beatty:** Ah, you caught me. *Network* is the only film that I've ever been in that was said word for word the way it was written. And as far as I know, no one was ever asked to play it word for word. It was a consensus of opinion that that's what should be done. It was a literate movie, and the action took place in order to fill in the words. Most filmmaking doesn't follow that pattern. Most film scripts aren't that literate. That was very special. It just had to be done that way.

**Question:** Are there certain screenwriters—like Paddy Chay-



efsky, who did *Network*—whose dialogue is followed word for word?

**Beatty:** Chayefsky's the only one I know of. There are people who want their words said word for word, and sometimes they get their way. If someone feels that way, then there must be a reason for it. I'll tell you my favorite story about that. Most of you, I hope, have never seen this film. I have never seen it. It was *Mickey & Nicky*, and it was directed by Elaine May. I'm being a little silly about it, but there are more stories about that particular film than anything I've ever been close to or even heard about. It was a film that took place in the course of one evening, from about seven to about seven the next morning. It basically had two characters, and a third who appeared somewhat, which was yours truly.

Anyway, Elaine May not only asks you to improvise, she gets in there and does it with you. Nine times out of ten, if you're doing a close-up, all of a sudden you realize that the camera's rolling and the other actor's not there and Elaine's playing the scene with you. She's there mainly to see how many screwballs she can throw and to see what kinds of weird things she can get out of you.

One time, Peter Falk and I had to do a scene in a car. He was doing "Columbo" during the day and trying to work for Elaine May all night long. It was about four in the morning when we finally got ready to shoot, and somebody was slapping Peter. Elaine was going to lie down in the backseat, and Peter and I were going to be riding in the front seat. We started driving, and I asked, "OK, where are we supposed to go?" Elaine said, "Go up there and take a left." Then I said, "Shall we start the cameras?"—because we were turning on our own cameras, the lights, and everything. And she said, "No, we have to rehearse." A little time went by, and Peter was sitting half asleep—the poor man, he'd been filming all day. I said, "Elaine, what is it you would like to rehearse?" There was a pause. "The scene." I said, "OK. Anything special you want?" A long pause. And I swear to you the answer came back, "What's wrong with the scene I wrote?"

Well, I hadn't seen a script for six months. We had thrown that away months ago. But she had a reason for it. It took forever to get it out of her, but she had timed this scene. She literally had lights set up on the street so that when certain lines were said, we would go through. Peter and I had to run off real quick and find scripts. Now that was in the middle of an entirely improvisational movie, where there was never any question of saying a line that was written down.

**Question:** Doesn't a movie with a good deal of improvisation—like Altman's *A Wedding*—call for a special kind of actor?

**Beatty:** I think Altman's films are in real trouble without certain kinds of actors in them. I have a theory about the film *M\*A\*S\*H*, which was Altman's first big success. My theory is that if Bobby Duvall were to be lifted bodily out of it, there would no longer be a film there. Now that's an actor's strong prejudice. I have great feeling for Robert Duvall's work. He is a tremendously subtle and gifted actor. He's a storyteller par excellence. If you go see *The Godfather*, and you could lift Bobby Duvall out of that movie, I think you'd be in intense trouble. For



Beatty's film debut, opposite Jon Voight, in *Deliverance*.

all the power that Mr. Brando has as an actor, I don't think he's a very good storyteller.

**Question:** Do all actors have to be storytellers?

**Beatty:** To me there are basically two kinds of acting. There are feature or character roles and leading roles. I think the basic difference is that character actors, like myself, tend to carry the action forward, and the leading players are the people that the action happens to. I'm always the guy who has to run into the room, throw open the curtains, and say, "The king is dead." It doesn't make any difference whether the king is dead or not. The other actors can sit there and go, "Oh," and do whatever they want.

**Question:** You seem to be stressing the importance of telling a story.

**Beatty:** I'm quite often taken with what happens to an audience when you don't tell them the story. But I must tell you, from an actor's standpoint, that most audiences will not let you get by with not telling the story. I had many years at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., and we did plays, plays, plays. It finally dawned on me that the basic thing we had to do with our audience was somehow tell them the story that we had to tell. We weren't doing experimental plays; we were doing plays that were tried and tested. And if you departed from the actual story, the audience had a tendency not to forgive you. I think getting people to receive dramatic content without a central character is a hard thing.

**Question:** What differences have you found between stage and film?

**Beatty:** Quite frankly, one of the shocking things to me about film is how phony it is. I'd been working in the theater for about seventeen years before I ever got in front of a camera. And I really expected it to be this ultimate truth, a test of how much truth you could come up with as an actor. I don't know why, but film makes so many more technical demands than stage acting does. Stage acting sort of gives you a space, and within that space you have all this control, all these possibilities. In film it works against

you in almost every way possible. Even to the point where if you get a performance that rings with some kind of truth, by the time you get it, the repetition will be going on film.

**Question:** Does the power of the film director over your performance disturb you?

**Beatty:** I have a rather cute answer, and I want you to forgive me for it being cute. It's a little bit like giving the audience the power when you walk onto the stage. For actors, the one thing we need in a director more than anything else is his attention. Because if he doesn't see what you're doing, there's little hope of anybody else seeing it. I think the major contribution of the director to the film is the particularization of the focus. My feeling is that he's not all important or godlike, because I don't think you can make a movie if you don't have something happening. I think actors are tremendously important. I don't really think you can make much of a film without events. And the kinds of events which gather the most attention are events that involve human beings.

**Question:** How difficult was it to work with a director like Altman?

**Beatty:** Bob Altman, in the first place, is a man I find very interesting. When I first met him, I thought, This is a guy just like me. It was almost as if I knew his nonsense, and I expected him right away to know mine. There was absolutely no shield, no nothing. There were people around who were looking at him as if, My God, I hope he says something so I can hear it. And I met this guy, and I thought, Oh, it's a guy. From the very beginning, I had a funny sort of rapport with him.

**Question:** While you were making *Nashville*, were you aware of the unusual structure of the film?

**Beatty:** The way I felt at the time, I knew we were doing something unusual. As far as form was concerned, we were doing something *very* unusual. But when we were making it, one of the things that Altman thought he was going to see happen—and he admitted this to me later—was that he was going to get twenty-five really strong personalities and not pick out anybody for the story to be about. He thought he was going to see a bunch of actors just tear each other up, like a free-for-all. It wasn't; there was a lot of cooperation. There was more of a problem between Altman and some of the actors than among the actors themselves. We all sort of got together and said, "Gee, we've got to tell a story here."

**Question:** You haven't worked with Altman since *Nashville*. Is there a reason?

**Beatty:** I wish we were working together more. I was going to do a second film with him, and, quite frankly, the whole thing blew up over money. Altman has a thing about not negotiating with anybody. Of course, if you tell an agent that you're not going to negotiate, you might as well tell him to slit his wrists. What's he going to do, take ten percent for answering the phone? He has to negotiate; that's his lifeblood. I asked Robert Duvall why he never

worked with Altman again. It turned out to be the same kind of problem that I had. I think Altman works with some excellent actors. I think he gives you such an opportunity that you really feel like you must accept your responsibility. Obviously, you can become totally indulgent in that kind of environment, and he's the kind of man who's not going to be turned off by your complete indulgence. He's fascinated by human behavior. I really believe he must like watching it.

**Question:** You seem to give all your characters specific physical gestures. In *Friendly Fire*, for example, you held your hands a certain way in many of the scenes. Was that intentional?

**Beatty:** In part it was. Actors are totally untrustworthy human beings. We have one basic rule: Use Anything. In *Friendly Fire* there were very often instances where I had something to do that took a great deal of screen time in which there was very low activity. The best way I had to get my strokes in was through physical posturing. There was a thing that I would do in one scene. I'd done some farm work when I was a kid, and I remembered one tenant farmer who never could seem to get his hands clean. And he had kind of a nervous gesture that had to do with the wiping of his hands. I noticed myself doing that in one scene; it was slightly subconscious, but it wasn't really. I was throwing that in.

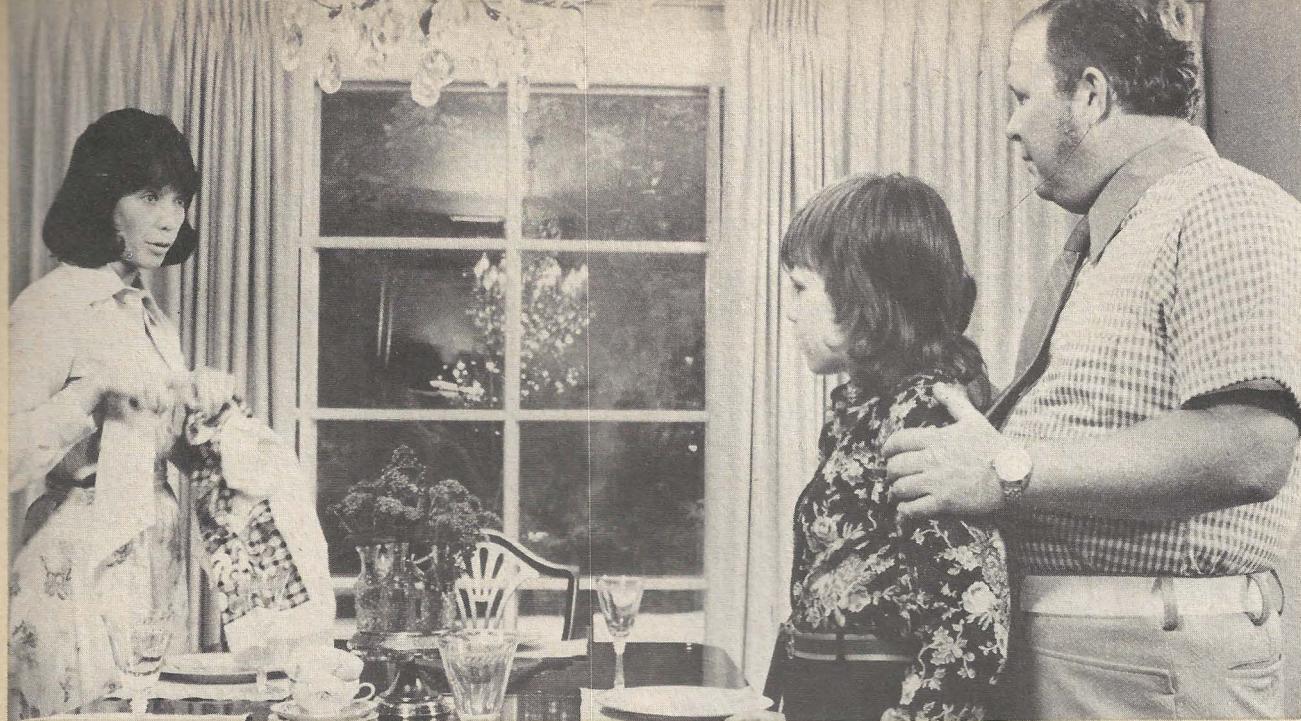
**Question:** You've done *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* and *Wise Blood* with John Huston. Is he like other directors you've worked with?

**Beatty:** He gives as open a world, I think, as Altman does, in his own way. As a man, he is very courtly and very mannerly. I think he's shy. I've only been working in film for nine years, and I've had two opportunities to work with John Huston, which is unusual. Especially because he wasn't terribly active during those years. He is very concerned with the written word. I think sometimes he considers himself a writer. If he feels good about the construction of the scene, he's not worried if a word or sentence gets changed here or there. He seems to be concerned about the construction.

And he's a very good watcher. It's wonderful to have a man of his stature, when you get through with the scene, say, "It's wonderful. It's very good." He's not terribly helpful if you're in trouble. If you're in deep trouble, I think he figures that he's getting along in years and he's not getting paid to do your job. So he's a man to go in knowing what you're doing.

**Question:** How did you become involved with *Wise Blood*?

**Beatty:** I don't really know how it all came together. It was rather amazing. I play a rather minor part in it; it's a cameo not unlike the *Network* appearance. Essentially it's a character who comes on to give one speech and carry through one action, and then he's gone. I was fascinated by it. My agent brought it to me. He's a New Yorker and a Californian, and doesn't know too much about the boondies. And he gave me the script, and he said, "Look, you really have to read this." So I read this thing, and I went back and said, "I'll do it." He said, "Really? You



"I didn't like watching myself in *Nashville*," Beatty says. "I'm constantly amazed that they give that fat guy my lines."

understood it?" I said, "Of course." It's really white trash soul. It's the most incredible story, and it touched my heart deeply because I have been there. I hope you will see it.

**Question:** What led you into film acting?

**Beatty:** I wanted to be a film actor. It really hit me hardest during the period of time in which *Midnight Cowboy* came out, and *Five Easy Pieces*. We're in a period of filmmaking now about which I'm aghast—I'm worried, I'm trying to write. What do we do? Let's do something. The kinds of things that I read just—

**Question:** Is that why you turned to television?

**Beatty:** Sometimes, especially in the area of social comment, there is no other place to work but television. I was in *The Execution of Private Slovik*, which was on television, but it would never have been done as a theatrical feature. I was in *The Marcus-Nelson Murders*, which most people think was just the "Kojak" pilot, but it was a very serious film that had been around as a feature project for years. I take great pride in that film. And things like *Friendly Fire*. I was in one this year which I loved. It didn't get much notice. It was called *All God's Children* and was—I see not many of you saw it—about school busing. It was a dramatic story written against that background. There are a lot of things you can do on television that you can't touch in features, and I think they're important things to do.

**Question:** Have you given up the stage completely?

**Beatty:** I'm not sure. When I first got away from it, I meant to go right back. And then I got lucky and started working in film. My career as an actor has been one of being able to be almost continually employed, in the theater

as well as in film. And once I got into film, I became so fascinated with it that I didn't have any real desire to go back. The only time since that I've done any stage work was when I did an experimental piece—again back at the Arena Stage in Washington—with Lily Tomlin. We only spent three weeks on it, and I loved it. It was a whole new world opening up. But now it's an economic pinch to think about doing a play. I've tended to, as many actors have, back myself into a corner where I need to make a certain amount of money in order to keep up whatever it is I'm keeping up. But I would like to work in the theater again.

**Question:** Your first film was *Deliverance*. How was it to work with director John Boorman?

**Beatty:** John Boorman is a wonderful filmmaker. *Deliverance*, I think, is probably the best film I was ever in. I think it's a classic because it hits on some absolutely fundamental human dilemmas about identity. It was the first feature film I was ever in, and I came to it from being in the theater for a long time. I didn't really care about whether I was in films or not—I was an actor and I was there to do my thing.

John Boorman is the kind of director who when you do a scene will come up to you and say, "That's awful." Or you'll say, "John, I have an idea. I think the scene can be about this, and it can be about this." And John will say, "That's ridiculous." I'm kidding about it. One of his main strengths is he's a confronter in life. And what happened in *Deliverance* was that we all were constantly confronting each other. I think that energy came out on the screen. Every time we came up to a scene, everybody had their feelings and their ideas about it. We just knocked heads with one another. And John Boorman was always right in there. Nobody was right and nobody was wrong. It was a little bit about hammering it out. And I think it made a very strong movie.

**Question:** Are you conscious of toning down your performance for film?

**Beatty:** I'm afraid I don't tone it down very often. That's a failure of mine, in one sense. But I decided to when I came into film—I remember the very first take I ever did—on *Deliverance*. The first thing I always wanted to know as an actor was: What's the space? We were doing



*The chairman of the board in Network, with Peter Finch and Robert Duvall. Beatty's brief appearance earned him an Oscar nomination.*

this great shot where we were coming up this hill and there was a gas station. I was the first guy who had to talk. Well, I came out of it acting like a banshee. John Boorman came out and said, "That's quite good. Except it might be a little bit too big." I said, "Oh." I got back in the car and did the same thing over again. Since that confrontation came at the very beginning, I was bound and determined that I wasn't going to start doing that in film.

**Question:** Do you think an actor should know the technical part of filmmaking?

**Beatty:** I want to know about lenses and about things like depth of focus. Nine times out of ten, it's in order to be helpful to the technicians, so that you're not working in a separate world. I'm a little bit fanatical about this business of working together. And those guys are as much a part of it as any group of actors. And their energy is a part of it, too. There's something about knowing a little bit about what their needs are, and their wants; I always feel good about it.

**Question:** Is there a key to understanding the character you played in *Deliverance*?

**Beatty:** For that character, the strongest thing was to be liked. You very often have to have "through lines." Some-

times through lines don't mean anything to the audience or anybody else. They're just that thing that you can always bring to the scene, that will always have life for you. And as an actor, you have to give it a name because you're within a formalized structure. The behavior in itself won't quite do it. It's like a trick that you can go back to.

For that particular through line, even though *Deliverance* was about white water canoeing and woods, I decided to use a cocker spaniel. I very often use an animal image. And all the time under the kind of salesman outer shell, I wanted my character to be somebody who desperately wanted to be liked, and desperately wanted to be accepted. So that the through line for that character would pay off in the very end because all the characters' needs had to grow in that film.

**Question:** Do you pay attention to critics?

**Beatty:** I have a rule that started before I ever came to Hollywood, when I was still in the theater. I never, ever, read anything about myself or about my work. I'll sneak a peak every once in a while, or occasionally someone will read something to me, but I try to avoid it. It's because I found that if I did read things, they affected me, generally adversely.

**Question:** Do you watch rushes?

**Beatty:** Very seldom. That was one interesting thing about *Nashville*. I was the only actor who didn't go to the dailies every day. Altman is very kind about inviting all the actors. And every night there's sort of a party to watch the dailies. I don't like to watch myself on the screen. I didn't like watching myself in *Nashville*. I'm constantly amazed that they give that fat guy my lines to say. I can never quite get used to it.

**Question:** Since your wife is here, I have a question for her. Do you ever look at the scripts?

**Tinker Beatty:** I do read them. When any script comes, I always look at it. I'm pretty new in this business, and I'm absolutely fascinated by it. Ned and I share this idea that you really have a lot of responsibility toward the audience when you're going to tell a story. And I think this is true particularly in the case of an actor like Ned, who brings a lot of power to what he chooses to tell. So we do talk about the things a lot. Ned was in a television thing called *Guyana Tragedy*, which we just went back and forth on whether or not it was simply using an incident for—

**Beatty:** Exploitation.

**Tinker Beatty:** Yes, exploiting it or whether it was something that needed to be brought forward. We still decided to do it.

**Question:** What are you doing now?

**Beatty:** At the present, I'm like many actors who gain some success and turn their energies toward trying to create projects. I have a writer-producer partner, and we've been

working on some stories together. So I've been thinking in that general area of how to tell a particular story.

**Question:** What is your opinion of current films?

**Beatty:** There's a lot of excessive filmmaking. I don't know where it comes from. I know it doesn't serve my desires or my feelings very well. I'm in a position now where I haven't worked for a little while. And I'm now on strike. I've turned some things down, and I haven't done that many times in my career. I'm beginning to wonder a little bit about the kinds of things that are coming my way. I like to work. The part of the country where I came from, that's what a man's supposed to do. He's supposed to work. I haven't been working for a while. It's not a terribly long time, but I'm concerned about it. I'm concerned

about where we're going. I think part of what contemporary filmmaking is about is going on with this strike right now. I have this strange feeling that one of the reasons we're having the strike is that a lot of us want to reorder our thinking. I don't think I'm the only one.

And I think we're in one of those periods where we're guilty of a terrible amount of shallowness. It's been wanting to come out for some time. We also know that there's a great deal of thievery in the business on many levels. And I, frankly, don't even count myself out on that because I've gotten into some of those levels of salaries which get into the level of thievery. I mean, you begin to wonder what you're taking the money for. It's a very personal thing, but I think on some level, possibly one of morality or something, we are at a place where we want to reevaluate. I hope that's happening.

## The Films of Ned Beatty

*Deliverance*—Warner Bros.—1972.

*The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*—National General Pictures—1972.

*White Lightning*—United Artists—1973.

*The Last American Hero*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1973.

*The Thief Who Came to Dinner*—Warner Bros.—1973.

*W.W. and the Dixie Dancekings*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1975.

*Nashville*—Paramount—1975.

*All the President's Men*—Warner Bros.—1976.

*The Big Bus*—Paramount—1976.

*Network*—United Artists—1976.

*Silver Streak*—Twentieth Century-Fox—1976.

*Mikey & Nicky*—Paramount—1976.

*Exorcist II: The Heretic*—Warner Bros.—1977.

*Shenanigans/The Great Georgia Bank Hoax*—Warner Bros.—1977.

*Superman*—Warner Bros.—1978.

*Gray Lady Down*—Universal—1978.

*Promises in the Dark*—Orion Pictures—1979.

*1941*—Universal—1979.

*Wise Blood*—New Line Cinema—1979.

*Hopscotch*—Avco Embassy Pictures—1980.

*The Incredible Shrinking Woman*—Universal—to be released.

## Television Movies

*The Marcus-Nelson Murders*—CBS—1973.

*Dying Room Only*—ABC—1973.

*The Execution of Private Slovik*—NBC—1974.

*The FBI Story/Attack on Terror: The FBI Versus the Ku Klux Klan*—CBS—1975.

*The Deadly Tower*—NBC—1975.

*Big Henry and the Polka Dot Kid*—NBC—1976.

*The Gardener's Son*—PBS—1977.

*Tail Gunner Joe*—NBC—1977.

*Lucan*—ABC—1977.

*Our Town*—NBC—1977.

*Alambrista!*—PBS—1977.

*A Question of Love*—ABC—1978.

*Friendly Fire*—ABC—1979.

*Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones*—CBS—1980.

*All God's Children*—ABC—1980.

*Denmark Vesey*—PBS—to be released.

Beatty moves easily between film and television. In *Friendly Fire*, he and Carol Burnett play a midwestern farm couple who lose their son in Vietnam.



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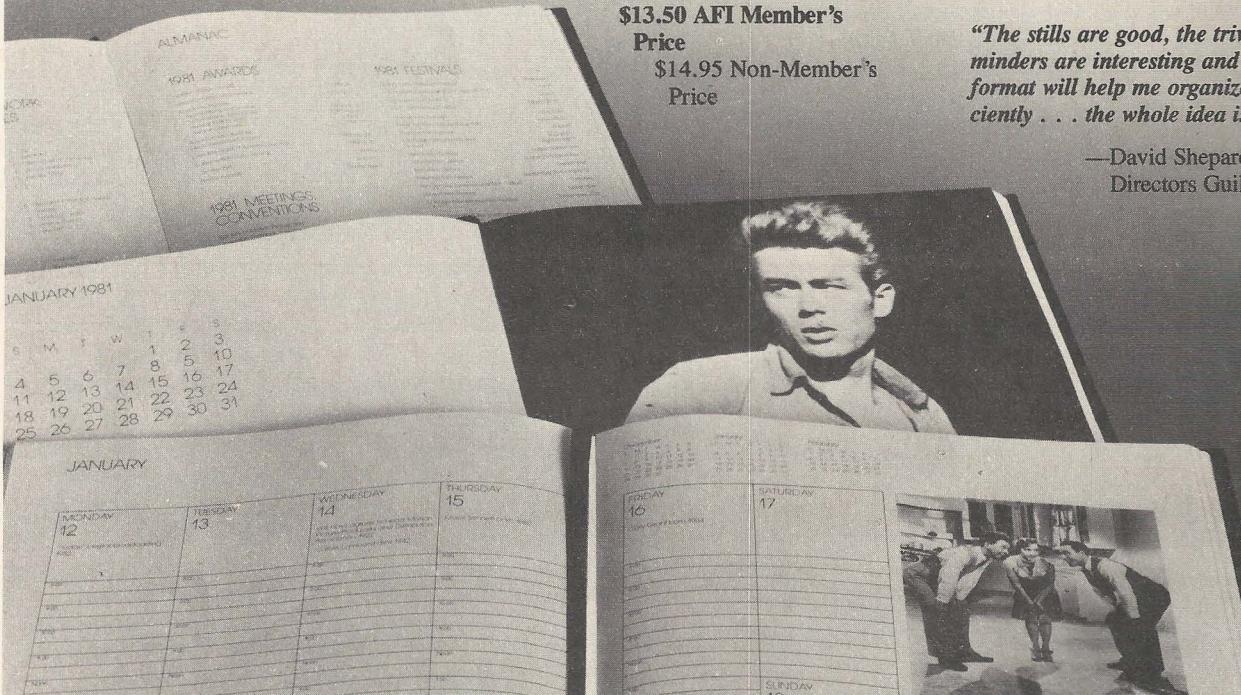
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## BUCK HENRY

from page 52

"I think maybe I need more anonymity than Woody does because he's been Woody for some time now," he says. "Also, Woody never seems to be having fun. I don't think he does have fun except in the work. I can goof off forever. I work very slowly. I'm not prolific like Woody or Neil Simon or any of those guys. They just pile it out and I can't, I just can't. I'm real slow and very lazy, and so when I'm not doing it, I have a terrific time. My life is not my work."

Daniel Melnick observes, "Buck is not perceived as preciously as Woody or even Marshall [Brickman]. I think he's much harder to define, and I think his bizarre-ness is harder to characterize. Buck has taken me to more interesting and exciting and bizarre places than anyone in my life. When I get a call from Buck at eleven o'clock at night and he says meet me down at the corner of wherever, I'll stop what I'm doing. Whatever he has in mind, it'll be interesting. And a major part of that fun is that he can be anonymous. Without his anonymity, he can be neither the participant nor the observer that gives him so much of his creative energy."

In the final analysis, Buck Henry would probably rather be reading. He is a compulsive reader of two hundred or so periodicals a month, and several friends say they have seen Buck reading magazines by flashlight while walking his dog nightly in the Hollywood hills. "One of the few manias I have—or psychoses," says Henry, "is the fear that I'm going to be trapped somewhere with nothing to read." His briefcase is packed with *New Yorkers*, *New York Reviews of Books*, newspapers, and "a lot of junk, too." A friend reports that in Henry's home, on a cliff overlooking Schwab's Pharmacy on Hollywood Boulevard, there are papers and books strewn everywhere, including the top of the refrigerator. He has a very small television somewhere near a pile of books.

"He reads all right, and he's funny and witty," says Richard Benjamin, who appears in *First Family*. "But what a lot of people don't know is that Buck is at the forefront of the sexual revolution. He knows where it's at, where it is, what's happening, and when it's happening. If there's something going on here or in Copenhagen, Buck will know it." Benjamin scratches his head. "Actually," he adds, "I don't know when Buck finds the time to read."

In the final analysis, Buck Henry would probably rather be reading. Several friends say they have seen Buck reading magazines by flashlight while walking his dog in the Hollywood hills.

**“Y**ears and years ago," Melnick says, "when we were working on 'Get Smart,' I was saying to Buck, 'Hey, wouldn't you want to direct a movie someday?' And I remember him saying, 'Well, I guess every red-blooded American boy has to direct a movie sooner or later.'" Melnick props his feet up on the coffee table in his office. "The first thing I did when I came to Columbia as an executive was to make an arrangement for Buck to write and direct three pictures for the company." Melnick has since left Columbia and is now an independent producer. "Basically, I'm interested in material that is unlike any other material. And I'm totally convinced that nothing Buck could do would be remotely like anything else."

*First Family*, Warners' major release for Christmas, represents a turning point in Buck Henry's career. While Woody Allen and Mel Brooks have gained their reputations as "filmmakers," Henry is considered basically a "writer of films." He is often credited, he says, with movies

that he did not write, such as *M\*A\*S\*H* and *Dr. Strangelove*, and at the same time isn't given his due for a movie like *Heaven Can Wait*. *First Family*, though, is Henry's through and through, a satire that is said to be in the *Strangelove* tradition.

"From the concept stage," Melnick says, "it became clear that this was a movie we had to make. One of the traps I've lived with all my life, especially in television, is the trap of sitting around the table and reading a script and everybody falling down. But then there's a slow, inexorable deterioration by the time you perform it. *None* of that happened in *First Family*."

*First Family*, though, was plagued with several problems during production, not the least of which was the weather. Henry's shooting schedule coincided with the worst rains in recent California history, resulting in mud slides and the destruction of several of the movie's sets. Scheduling problems also arose because of Gilda Radner's commitment to "Saturday Night Live" in New York. There were few scenes that weren't delayed.

*Laraine Newman and Gilda Radner with their favorite uncle in a "Saturday Night Live" sketch.*



"If I had made six films," Henry says, "and this had been my seventh, I would have been a quivering, nervous, jelloid wreck. As it was, I was very twitchy in preproduction. I really don't know why. I felt awful. I was generally a mess. I had thought about the film for twenty-four hours a day over and over for some months. That is something I had never experienced—total immersion. To wake up at four in the morning in the middle of a thought about the film, not knowing where the thought began—it's never happened to me before."

"Buck has the rare ability," Melnick says, "that many, many directors don't have: the ability to say help. He had no problem turning to one of several people and saying: Is this the best way to do this? That's a marvelous ability." As director, Henry displayed a certain benign approach. "Buck was very simple and direct," says Richard Benjamin. "There wasn't that much talk. Very few takes. Very few changes in the script. In fact, the last thing we talked about was how to do the movie."

"It helped to know the cast as well as I did," says Henry. "I think if I had had a different cast, I could very well have been a nervous wreck throughout."

But even though we had no rehearsal, by the time we started, I had such confidence in the actors and a familiarity with the material that they were things I didn't have to reach for or worry about. The technical problems were so large there was simply no time to be concerned with them."

But the center held throughout the shooting. It helped that Buck Henry has a comic vision that is unified, and understands what is required of each role. He is also able to form a very special bond with the people he works with. "You spend so much time compressing what they do well into short periods," he says, "that you have to find a rhythm to allow those little bursts to carry over through the waiting periods. If they think you've lost control over it, or don't know what's going on—as I frequently don't—then the focus is lost."

"I interact," Henry says, speaking about his creative process on the set. "Maybe it would be better with a gun." He adds, "I think the director should hold as many pieces of the puzzle as possible. There are directors who can work and read and make phone calls and have a complicated social life. I envy them. It's real good to know how to do

that. I wasn't able to do it. I didn't find it hard to keep thinking about the film; I found it trying. I don't believe in aggravation, but I didn't come up for air once, not during shooting, no."

If Buck Henry doesn't believe in aggravation, then he certainly believes in a healthy dose of pessimism. "Suppose," he says slowly, "suppose things get so bad, people don't want to deal with politics in any part of life. I don't want to invent a scenario that may come true, but things may get too hot, too spooky, politically."

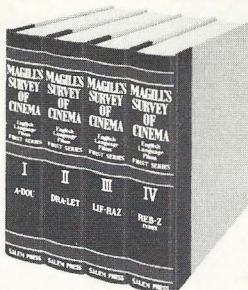
Could a November election hurt a political comedy in December? "It's an anxiety we both share," says Melnick. "There are no answers. Our politicians are such satires on politicians that we both worry. As outrageous as this film is, can it top some of the outrageous things that some of the dummies will be doing?" Melnick pauses and then adds quickly, "But Buck has written and directed with such invention I'm not overly concerned. Of course, what's funny to me might not be terribly funny to Ronald Reagan."

Jon S. Denny, a writer and television producer, divides his time between Los Angeles and New York, where he lives.

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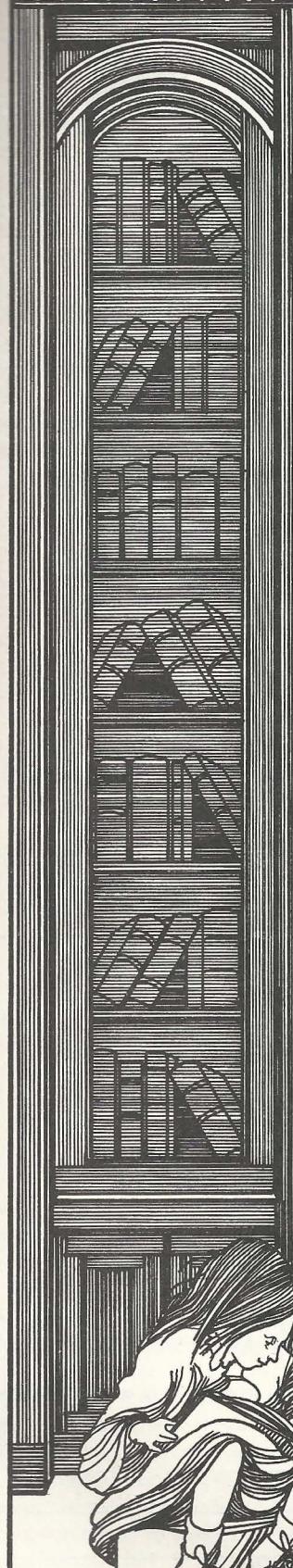
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—

## The Basic Film Bookshelf

Jeanine Basinger

I can remember a time when the definitive film book collection consisted of one title—Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer's *The Movies*. It was a combination history/sociology/picture book distillation of sixty years of film between hard covers. At the time, it was my only book on film, and I ascribed to it a status roughly equivalent to that of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Today, *The Movies*, with its cursory information and its clichéd stills, seems almost quaint, though I retain a fondness for it.

Since then, with hundreds of titles pub-

lished each year, my shelves have become loaded with film books. In fact, to assemble an ideal collection of film books for someone serious about film in all its aspects, limitations would have to be set immediately; otherwise, the list would take up far too much space. I know what I don't want: books with "media" in the title; books called something like *The Movie Bedside Companion* or *The Movie Watcher's Primer*, which are alleged explanations of everything and everyone in film history; books about how Hollywood falsified the presentation of this or that;



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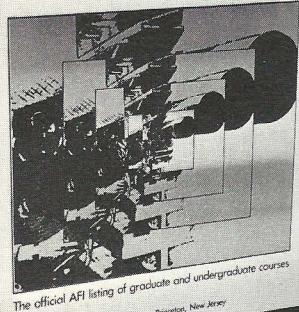
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 **The American Film Institute**

books on Marilyn Monroe. With those categories eliminated, the task is simplified considerably.

In terms of scholarly influence, the single most important book on film published in the last twenty years has to be Andrew Sarris's *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968*. Sarris pioneered the serious study of American film in this country. His book is one of the most discussed and widely read film books I know. People who denounced Sarris (or who merely thought him crazy) have long since adopted his ideas and evaluations. Although Sarris has revised many of his original opinions and other scholars have dug more deeply where he broke ground, his book still stands as the starting place for the serious evaluation of American cinema.

For people who want to test Sarris by viewing the films he evaluated, Leonard Maltin's handy *TV Movies* is a first step. This fat little paperback may seem a strange choice for the definitive bookshelf, but there is no better, more complete, or more knowledgeable short guide to old films. Maltin keeps the book fresh, revising and updating with every new edition. The practical usefulness of *TV Movies* is obvious, and its influence is underrated.

For sheer fame and general influence, no respectable film book collection can omit a book by Pauline Kael. I first read her salty reviews back when she was writing notes for the old Cinema Guild theater in Berkeley. She was always funny, always passionate, always informed, and, more often than not, right on target about the films programmed there. My own choice from the collections of her writings is *I Lost It at the Movies*. Maybe it's the title that draws me, but how can I hate a book that thrashes Siegfried Kracauer, likens academic film criticism to vampirism, and says that *A View From the Bridge* isn't "worth much discussion"?

Alongside Kael I would place two other collections of film reviews, *The Film Criticism of Otis Ferguson* and Manny Farber's *Movies* (formerly *Negative Space*). Ferguson was ahead of his time, and Farber is always outside of his. These are two critical perspectives I treasure—someone to move me forward and teach me, and someone to make me reconsider the critical clichés of the day. I would also include Tom Milne's translation of Godard's writings on film, *Godard on Godard*. In many ways, Godard is the best film critic of all. Two recent remarks of Godard's are: "A camera is an X-ray machine to show your own disease"

and "America has been making the same movie for the last twenty years, just changing the title." With quotes like that, who needs books?

In the serious scholar category, I put Robin Wood's books in a special place. Although he recently told me he would now do over completely *Hitchcock's Films*, I still use it for my classes. That book and *Howard Hawks* are two examples of serious criticism that lay a foundation for anyone who wants to look at films as more than entertainment, without losing the pleasures of viewing them. Wood grows and goes forward to new attitudes and scholarly modes, but what he has left behind is still valuable.

In the area of best books in a field, my two favorites on silent film are Kevin Brownlow's beautiful and informative *The Parade's Gone By* and William K. Everson's *American Silent Film*. Brownlow and Everson are writers of such enormous influence that any book by either one is important. Both are devoted to their subjects, know everything there is to know about film history, have seen the films they write about, and write well. I am also fond of George C. Pratt's *Spellbound in Darkness*, a unique collection of readings and criticism from the silent era.

The enormous number of excellent books on directors and genres makes selection particularly difficult. But a few representative titles are: Jim Kitses's *Horizons West* (a pioneer structuralist study, intelligent and readable); Carlos Clarens's two books, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* and *Crime Movies*; Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington on *John Ford*; the recent translation of Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer's *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*; and Michel Ciment's *Kazan on Kazan*, the very best of the interview books, in which an intelligent, thoroughly informed scholar and an intelligent, articulate director come together in shared respect.

When my students ask me for one book to help them "understand film," I always give them V.F. Perkins's *Film as Film*. If one book can do it, that's it. It's about just what it says it's about: *film as film*, written with remarkable clarity and insight. To go with it, I would suggest Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Dudley J. Andrew's *The Major Film Theories*, and probably Ralph Stephenson and J.R. Debrix's *The Cinema as Art*. Stephenson and Debrix have a writing style that is about as lively as leftover spaghetti, but their ideas are good

and they understand the language of film.

It isn't fair to leave out books that are purely fun—cocktail table pretties, star biographies, and "the films of" series, which so far have covered everyone except Lassie and Vera Rhruba Ralston. Surely the most beautiful picture book of them all is Larry Carr's *Four Fabulous Faces*, a stunning collection of photographs of Crawford, Dietrich, Garbo, and Swanson. Turning the pages of this sumptuously produced book, the magic and mystery of the star system can almost be grasped.

Almost, but not quite. It's that gap between reality and image that seems to haunt the biographies of movie stars. I'm still looking for the great star biography that will explain it all to me. (In the meantime, I'll read David Thomson's *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*, with its perceptive thoughts on numerous stars.) In the autobiography category, however, I would choose Charlton Heston's *The Actor's Life*, one of the few books to give a real glimpse into the acting profession, and Frank Capra's *The Name Above the Title*, which does the same for the director's world.

The two best books in "the films of" department are Lou Valentino's *The Films of Lana Turner* and Ella Smith's *Starring Miss Barbara Stanwyck*. Valentino, an art director for Time-Life, has turned his book into a valentine for Turner, packing it with stunning stills and meticulously researched details. Smith, a film scholar, spent years preparing her book, writing Stanwyck's co-workers and recording their thoughts and memories. She also analyzes each film thoroughly.

There are several gorgeous (and expensive) books about the great studios and the films they produced, but for real insight into the studio system, the best is Donald Knox's *The Magic Factory: How MGM Made An American in Paris*. Reading it, one is struck by the complexity of the studio system, its strengths and weaknesses, and the fundamental truth that filmmaking is a group effort.

Even a home library needs a reliable reference shelf, and this is especially true for film, a subject that many local libraries do not adequately cover. I would include these reference titles: *50 Golden Years of Oscar: The Official History of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences* (richly produced and totally accurate); all volumes of the *New York Times* film reviews; the complete collection of *Screen Worlds*; and the American Film Institute's two completed catalogs.

In the personal taste column, I place three favorite books that I would recommend to any reader, film buff or not, for their wit, intelligence, and elegance of style: Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape* (there may never be a better book on the image of women on film); Richard Corliss's *Talking Pictures* (the only serious refutation of the auteurists' directorial bias); and Arlene Croce's *The Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers Book*.

In the nobody-knows-it-but-it's-great category, there is Barbara Deming's *Running Away From Myself: Dream Portrait of America*, a forerunner of such books as Robert Sklar's *Movie-Made America* and Michael Wood's *America in the Movies* (both of which are themselves worthy). In the out-of-print department (at least the last time I checked) is James Limbacher's *Four Aspects of the Film* and John Alton's *Painting With Light*. The former is an invaluable reference book on the historical development of sound, wide-screen, color, and 3-D, and the latter is a book, by one of Hollywood's greatest cinematographers, which manages to be both poetic and practical.

For anyone who likes to keep a book by the bed, I have two candidates: *The Book of Hollywood Quotes* compiled by Gary Herman, and John Springer's *Forgotten Films To Remember*. The quotes book has a million jewels, such as Harry Cohn's famous "I don't have ulcers, I give them" and, from an unnamed producer, "1810? When was that?" Springer has stuffed his book with charming memories of beloved old films.

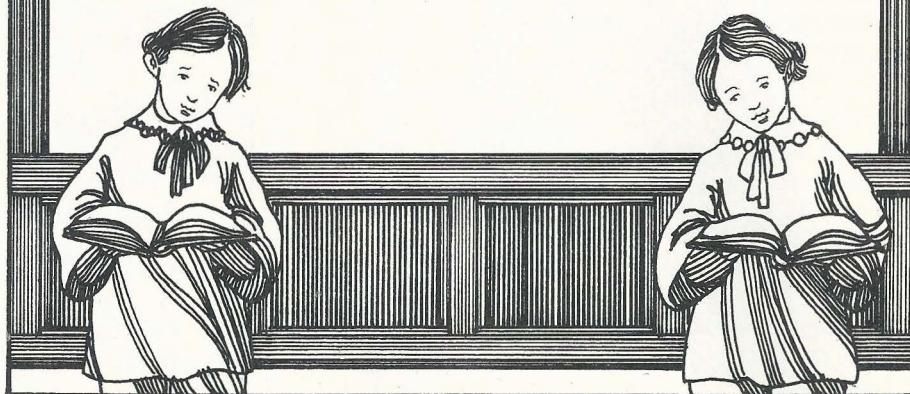
Unless this listing is itself to turn into a book, it seems appropriate to bow out with the suggestion that everyone buy James Monaco's *How To Read a Film*. A clear-minded introduction to many aspects of film, Monaco's book contains an annotated bibliography of film books by category. Look there to find your own favorites on all the subjects I omitted, from B-movies to shorts, from costume design to technological developments.

If I were asked that hateful question "What ten film books would you take to a desert island?" my reply would be fast and firm: "No books, please, just films." At some point, I like to take my movies straight. As James Cagney says in *Strawberry Blonde*, "That's the kind of hairpin I am."

---

Jeanine Basinger teaches film at Wesleyan University and is the author of *Anthony Mann* and other books on film.

## And a Shelf on Television



James Monaco

Five years ago, if you went into a good bookstore looking for books on television, you could have carried home everything worth reading in a small shopping bag and paid with small bills. A half hour in a used book shop would have netted you two or three more titles, and your library of television scholarship would have been as complete as you could make it.

That is no longer the case. Television studies mushroomed in the late seventies the way film studies did ten years before. There are now a number of good and useful reference books (none existed before 1975); an ever-growing shelf of historical and critical inquiries; and—believe it or not—a growing library of important theory. This last area is most intriguing because, in film, it's been fifty years since American writers made influential contributions to theory. Maybe we take television more seriously.

I've reduced the absolutely essential television library to a mere five volumes—a good reference work, a solid history, a couple of critical approaches, and a theoretical jeremiad. What's missing—still to come in American television studies—is a good introduction to the social and cultural structure of television. So far, the work done in this area has been piecemeal.

1. *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television* by Erik Barnouw. Oxford. This is clearly the one book about television to buy when you're buying only

one. *Tube of Plenty* is a landmark, a condensation of Barnouw's prizewinning three-volume *History of Broadcasting in the United States*. It's anecdotal, exciting, dramatic reading—and it is also very serious and useful scholarship. Everyone who writes about television past or present in the United States now owes a great debt to Barnouw. (The three original volumes, incidentally, are just as good reading, and they provide three times as much information.)

2. *The New York Times Encyclopedia of Television* by Les Brown. Times Books. The only real television encyclopedia available (nearly all the other recent reference books are nostalgia-oriented lists of old programs), Brown's magnum opus is crammed with useful and interesting information on the medium and its history. It includes entries on technology, personalities, series, and historical developments.

3. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* by Raymond Williams. Schocken Books. Raymond Williams is perhaps the most important media theorist now at work. This is a thin, slightly haphazard book, but Williams raises more significant and germane issues about the structure and function of television than any other writer.

4. *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger. Viking. Art critic and novelist John Berger produced and wrote a short television series for the BBC in the early seventies, and this is the book that came out of

it. It's the best introduction to semiotic and structural analysis of images and imagery that exists in English, and it is especially good on the functions of television commercials.

5. *The Plug-In Drug: Television, Children, and the Family* by Marie Winn. Viking; Bantam. For most of its thirty years, television criticism has harped on one theme: content. In the sixties Marshall McLuhan gained some notoriety shifting the focus from content to form, but McLuhan, as often as not, was wrong-headed and superficial. Marie Winn is the first television critic to write about the medium in its social and political context and to seriously challenge the very existence of the medium itself. The most crucial issues regarding television are raised here in a cogent and convincing essay.

Also recommended:

**History**—Asa Briggs's three-volume *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (Oxford) does for British television what Barnouw does for the American tube. Jeff Greenfield's *Television: The First Fifty Years* (Abrams) is a thoughtful and useful, if brief, introduc-

tion. (It is also prohibitively expensive.) *TV Guide: The First 25 Years* edited by Jay S. Harris (Simon & Schuster; New American Library) offers an interesting pop culture view of the medium in reprints of the little magazine.

**Reference**—Vincent Terrace's *Complete Encyclopedia of Television Programs 1947-1976* (A. S. Barnes, two volumes) was the first program list. The best is Nina David's annual *TV Season* (Oryx Press), aimed mainly at the library market but well worth the investment for serious television buffs. Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh's *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows 1946-Present* (Ballantine) fills in the years before David started. It is the best one-volume guide to programming. Craig and Peter Norback's *TV Guide Almanac* (Ballantine) is a hodgepodge of information, some of it useful and interesting. *Who's Who on Television* (ITV Books/Michael Joseph, London) has the faces, credits, and biographies of a thousand stars of British television. Of course, this number includes a quantity of Americans.

**General**—Les Brown's *Television: The Business Behind the Box* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) was published in 1971, but

remains a classic introduction to the television industry. Horace Newcomb's *TV: The Most Popular Art* (Doubleday) is a useful general introduction. See also Newcomb's collection of essays, *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford). Of the many books about the inside of the television business, perhaps the best is Bob Shanks's *The Cool Fire: How To Make It in Television* (Random House). Laurence Bergreen's *Look Now, Pay Later* (Doubleday) is also recommended.

The British Film Institute publishes an ambitious series of scholarly monographs on television issues. Included are volumes on *Television and History*, *Television: Ideology and Exchange*, and *Broadcasting and Accountability*. (They are distributed in the United States by New York Zoetrope.)

**Criticism**—So far, Michael J. Arlen of the *New Yorker* is the only periodical television critic to have his pieces collected between prestigious hard covers: *Living-Room War* (Viking) and *The View From Highway 1* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) are the titles.

**Issues**—*Remote Control: Television and the Manipulation of American Life* by Frank Mankiewicz and Joel Swerdlow

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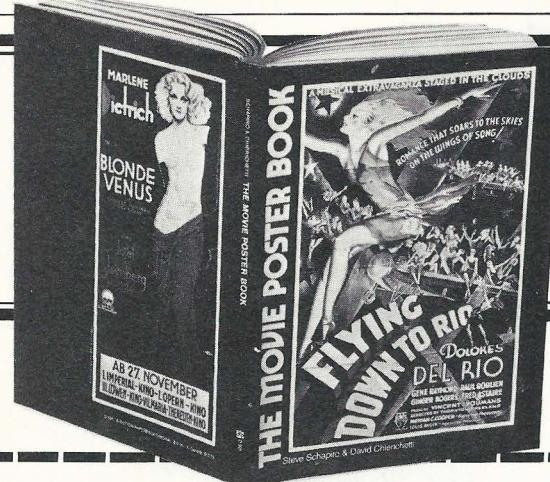
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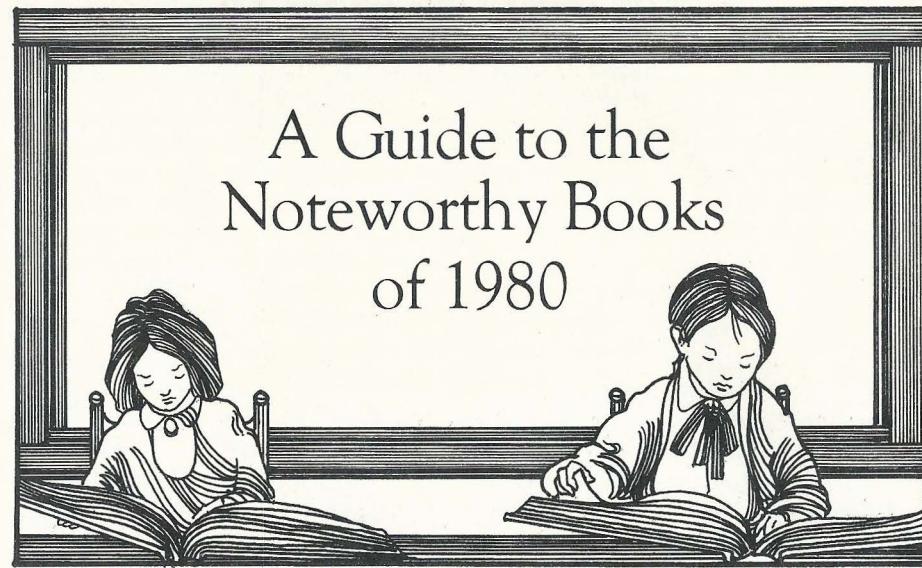
(Times Books) is a solid introduction to issues. Because it is more generally oriented, it might even replace Marie Winn on our core list. It is also repetitious and sometimes pedantic. Tony Schwartz's *The Responsive Chord* (Doubleday) is seven years old but still an engrossing introduction to television manipulation. Herbert I. Schiller's *Mass Communications and American Empire* (Beacon) remains the best essay on television as a tool of cultural imperialism. Rose K. Goldsen's *The Show and Tell Machine* (Dial) is a solid contribution to the anti-television argument, but ex-ad man Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (William Morrow) retires the prize here. It is actually a catalog of hundreds of arguments against television.

**News**—Television has had a profound effect on many areas of life, but perhaps nowhere has it altered our perceptions so drastically as in its presentation of news. Herbert J. Gans's *Deciding What's News* (Random House) is a good introduction, as is Ron Powers's *The News Casters: The News Business as Show Business* (St. Martin's). See also Edward Jay Epstein's *News From Nowhere: Television and the News* (Random House).

**Advertising**—This is American television's raison d'être; we'd better pay close attention. Erik Barnouw's *The Sponsor: Notes on a Modern Potentate* (Oxford) is a succinct introduction. Michael J. Arlen's *Thirty Seconds* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) eloquently describes the production of a television commercial. See also Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (Marion Boyars), which provides an interesting complement to John Berger's book, and John W. Wright's *The Commercial Connection: Advertising and the American Mass Media* (Dell), which has much useful information.

**Television Abroad**—Very little has appeared in English on European television, so if you want to find out what the tube is like in other countries, it's going to be necessary to learn a little French or Italian. *Le Televisioni in Europa* by Roberto Grandi and Giuseppe Richeri (Feltrinelli) is the best introduction to the subject.

James Monaco is the author of *How To Read a Film*, *Media Culture, Celebrity*, and the forthcoming *You Talkin' to Me? James Monaco on Film and Television*, a collection of essays. He is television critic for National Public Radio's "Morning Edition."



## A Guide to the Noteworthy Books of 1980

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND BIOGRAPHY

**Bittersweet** by Susan Strasberg. Putnam's, \$10.95. An actress struggles with a famous father and a roller coaster career.

**Donahue: My Own Story** by Phil Donahue and Co. Simon & Schuster, \$11.95; Fawcett, paper, \$2.95. How daytime television's newest star got to where he is.

**Errol Flynn: The Untold Story** by Charles Higham. Doubleday, \$12.95. According to this author, his wicked ways included spying for the Nazis.

**Finch, Bloody Finch: A Life of Peter Finch** by Elaine Dundy. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$14.95. The internationally respected star and his stormy life.

**Front and Center** by John Houseman. Simon & Schuster, \$15. The second installment in the memoirs of the urbane producer, director, and actor.

**Garbo** by Alexander Walker. Macmillan, \$19.95. More tales to add to the legend.

**Gregory Peck** by Michael Freedland. William Morrow, \$10.95. The screen career of a square-jawed, upright man.

**Heyday** by Dore Schary. Little, Brown, \$14.95. From a staff writer at MGM to the head of production, plus many fascinating side trips.

**Ingrid Bergman: My Story** by Ingrid Bergman and Alan Burgess. Delacorte, \$14.95. Part autobiography, part biography: a turbulent life marked by scandal and triumphant comeback.

**The Last Hero: A Biography of Gary Cooper** by Larry Swindell. Doubleday, \$12.95. The life of a surprisingly versatile actor.

**Lee Strasberg: The Imperfect Genius of the Actors Studio** by Cindy Adams. Doubleday, \$13.95. The man who

shaped Brando, Clift, Monroe, and others.

**Merv: An Autobiography** by Merv Griffin with Peter Barsocchini. Simon & Schuster, \$11.95. Band singer turns talk show host.

**Moments With Chaplin** by Lillian Ross. Dodd, Mead, \$8.95. Vignettes in the life of the great comic filmmaker.

**Moving Places** by Jonathan Rosenbaum. Harper & Row, \$11.95; paper, \$5.95. A critic's autobiography which takes place largely in movie theaters.

**An Open Book** by John Huston. Knopf, \$15. The long and bumpy story of a larger-than-life man and his films.

**Rex Ingram, Master of the Silent Cinema** by Liam O'Leary. Barnes & Noble, \$28.50. A reappraisal of a master of the silent image.

**Ruth Gordon: An Open Book** by Ruth Gordon. Doubleday, \$11.95. Book two in the memoirs of the writer-actress.

**Shelley: Also Known as Shirley** by Shelley Winters. William Morrow, \$14.95. The latest—and most popular—in the kiss-and-tell genre of Hollywood autobiography.

**Starmaker: The Autobiography of Hal Wallis** by Hal Wallis and Charles Higham. Macmillan, \$13.95. A Hollywood producer who made the successful transition from the studio system to independence tells his story.

**Susan Hayward: Portrait of a Survivor** by Beverly Linet. Atheneum, \$12.95. Trials and tribulations, both on screen and off.

**Swanson on Swanson** by Gloria Swanson. Random House, \$15.95. *La grande dame* of the silent screen recalls an eventful life.

**Take Two: A Life in Movies and Politics** by Philip Dunne. McGraw-Hill, \$14.95. Literate account of a

screenwriter's life and his involvement with the blacklist.

**This Life** by Sidney Poitier. Knopf, \$12.95. America's most prominent black actor tells how he got to the top.

**Walking the Tightrope: The Private Confessions of a Public Relations Man** by Henry C. Rogers. William Morrow, \$10.95. Inside the world of Hollywood press-agentry.

## DIRECTOR STUDIES

**Billy Wilder** by Bernard F. Dick. Twayne, \$9.95. The latest study of the writer-director who put the bite in American film comedy.

**Jean Renoir: The French Films, 1924-1939** by Alexander Sesonske. Harvard University, \$25; paper, \$9.95. Analysis of the most fruitful period in this great filmmaker's career.

**Joseph Losey** by Foster Hirsch. Twayne, \$12.95. The career of the expatriate director with a wildly eclectic filmography.

**Martin Scorsese: The First Decade** by Mary Pat Kelly. Redgrave, paper, \$8.95. The first full-length study of the director of *Mean Streets* and *Raging Bull*.

**Peckinpah: The Western Films** by Paul Seydor. University of Illinois, \$12.95. *The Wild Bunch*, *Junior Bonner*, *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*, *Ride the High Country* analyzed in fascinating detail.

**René Clair** by Celia McGerr. Twayne, \$12.95. Examination of the "little world" of one of France's great but neglected filmmakers.

## ESSAYS AND CRITICISM

**Before My Eyes** by Stanley Kauffmann. Harper & Row, \$16.95. The *New Republic*'s film critic surveys the late seventies.

**Collette at the Movies: Criticism and Screenplays** edited by Alain Virmaux and Odette Virmaux. Ungar, \$10.95; paper, \$5.95. The French novelist's fascination with film.

**My Prime Time: Confessions of a TV Watcher** by Katie Kelly. Seaview/Harper & Row, \$10.95. Reflections of an on-the-air critic.

**The Pleasure Dome: The Collected Film Criticism 1935-40** by Graham Greene. Oxford, paper, \$8.95. Reviews from the thirties, which, in many cases, have endured far better than the films they discuss.

**Prime-Time America: Life on and Behind the Television Screen** by Robert Sklar. Oxford, \$13.95. How we see television, and how television sees us.

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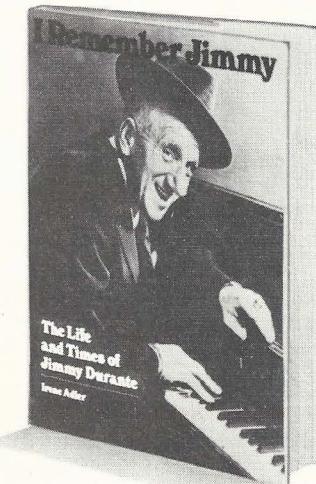
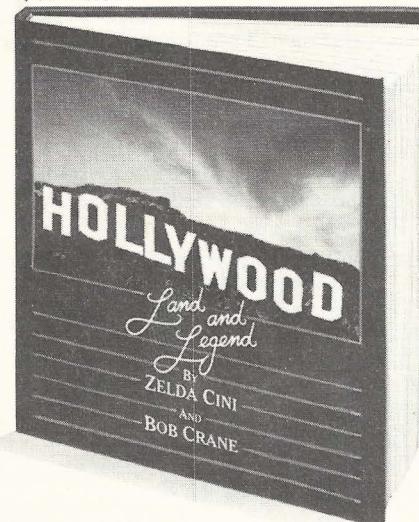
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**The Art of the Great Hollywood Portrait Photographers 1925-1940** by John Kobal. Knopf, \$35. Beautiful pictures of the beautiful people.

**A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Coppola, Scorsese, Altman** by Robert Phillip Kolker. Oxford, \$15.95. Five contemporary filmmakers examined.

**The Complete Films of William S. Hart: A Pictorial Record** by Diane Kaiser Koszarski. Dover, paper, \$8.95. A labor of love on one of the silent screen's underappreciated stars.

**The Eye of the Storm: The Alfred E. Dupont-Columbia University Survey of Broadcast Journalism** by Marvin Barrett. Lippincott & Crowell, \$12.95; paper, \$5.95. Essays and statistics: the seventh annual report.

**Film Tricks: Special Effects in the Movies** by Harold Schechter and David Everitt. Harlin Quist, paper, \$11.95. Unmasking the magic that creates the monsters, catastrophes, and star wars.

**Growing Up on Television** by Kate Moody. Times Books, \$12.95. What television does for and to children.

**Hemingway and the Movies** by Frank M. Laurence. University of Mississippi, \$20. How Papa's novels and stories made it to the screen.

**Hollywood Renaissance: The New Generation of Filmmakers and Their Works** by Diane Jacobs. Dell, paper, \$6.95. Analysis of the Hollywood filmmakers who matter; an updated edition.

**Indian Film** by Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy. Oxford, paper, \$5.95. Second edition. An updated revision of the standard work on the subject.

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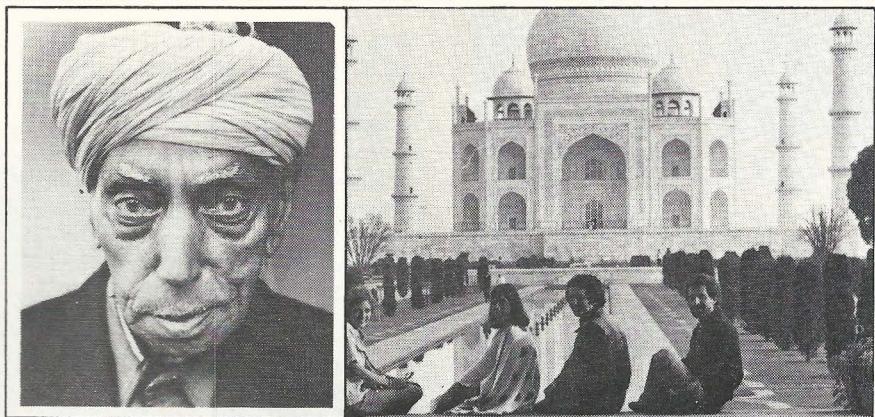
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**The Great TV Sitcom Book** by Rick Mitz. Richard Marek, \$25. Part nostalgia, part reference: a personal view of television's funniest—and not so funny—moments.

**Hollywood: The Pioneers** by Kevin Brownlow. Knopf, \$20. Lovingly re-created history of the silent era illustrated with rarely seen photographs.

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## POPEYE

from page 36  
them. You don't want to disappoint him."

As Geraldine Chaplin once put it, Altman has a wonderful way of allowing people to contribute something that turns out to be exactly what he wanted all along. The contributions seem to feed his creativity. Unlike, say, Hitchcock, who was said to be bored with the actual shooting, Altman is in his element on the set, taking enormous delight in how things develop and in how his own ideas crystallize in response. Speaking of *Popeye*, Altman himself says, "The actors, the sets, the costumes, the cameras, the sea, the weather, and the other things going on, all of that compounds to make a very solid core. They are the script. They really set the tone of this thing."

The dance sequences of *Popeye*, for example, went through an interesting evolution. After so many dance and movement classes, the dancing for the camera turned out to be not tight and slick, but loose and even ragged. Sharon Kinney, the former Twyla Tharp dancer who was *Popeye's* choreographer, explained on the set, "We are trying to get away from steps, per se. The movement is blocked out. But I think Bob feels that these people would not be sophisticated dancers—and he doesn't want choreography to be an interruption in the story."

Robin Williams, who took tap-dancing lessons, said during shooting, "Most of the tap steps will still be there but in a guise. They'll be there in the fight scenes, underneath." Williams added, "But *Popeye's* more of an unmusical, really. For better or worse, there won't be a full-blown dance number. I think the idea is: Keep the story driving."

If there are movie musical purists, Altman is bound to offend them with *Popeye*. The music underwent an unconventional refining process in Malta. At least three of *Popeye's* songs were written by Nilsson on the island; songs written expressly for one character were being given by Altman to another or to the chorus; as late as March the director wasn't sure what the final sequence of the tunes would be, since plans for later editing included "mixing songs up, putting two together, one song following another in the same scene."

While Altman's changeability caught Nilsson off guard and sparked occasional flare-ups, Nilsson's own style of work, his own appetite for circumstance and spontaneity, was very much like the di-

rector's. The small band of musicians gathered under Nilsson to lay down the recorded demos and playback tapes for each day's filming included such pop music notables as banjo player Doug Dillard, bass guitarist Klaus Voormann, percussionist Ray Cooper, and arranger Van Dyke Parks. (All of them doubled as townsfolk of Sweethaven.) As on the set, there was no perfectionism in the recording studio built from scratch for Nilsson's use. Voices were a little flat here, a little sharp there, but the basic tracks were to be overdubbed later for the sound track.

For "I Yam What I Yam," Popeye's signature tune, Nilsson was faced with the task of writing a song as catchy as the one practically every cartoon fan knows by heart. The tune Nilsson came up with is a triumphant little melody that Robin Williams, improvising with comic patter between the lyrics, knocked out in an afternoon. When Ray Walston, the old song-and-dance pro who plays Popeye's father in the picture, showed up to run through one of his numbers, he discovered that a rehearsal was not on the agenda. "I'm doing it without any rehearsal," he said disbelievingly as Nilsson led him into the walled-off recording room. "I haven't any rehearsal at all." Watching from the sidelines, Feiffer assured him, "This is the rehearsal. We'll keep doing it until it's right. Think of it that way. Nothing's for keeps."

Nobody who had been watching Nilsson at work was very surprised that the rehearsal was for keeps. The song was a *kvetch* about ungrateful offspring reminiscent of "Kids" from *Bye Bye Birdie*. Nilsson soothed Walston's nervousness and conducted his singing from inside the engineer's booth with the physical contortion and eloquence of a conductor leading an entire philharmonic. Walston, his eyes trained with fascination on Nilsson, wrapped up the song before supertime.

**L**ate one night, while Altman was filming by the bay, Jules Feiffer and Paul Dooley (in his Wimpy outfit) mixed themselves drinks and sprawled on a sofa in the production office. They were pursuing a favorite topic. Dooley said he loved *Images*. Feiffer said he hated *Images*. What he really loved was *California Split*. Feiffer said he thought Altman's movies were sometimes too illogical. Dooley said he thought illogical was one

"As tempting as popcorn."\*

## When the Shooting Stops... the Cutting Begins

A FILM

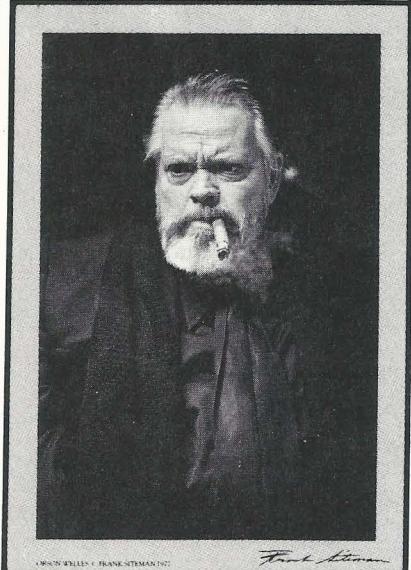
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of their strengths. Dooley compared Altman to Frank Capra and Preston Sturges. Feiffer compared Altman to Eugene Debs.

Late another night, after shooting had wrapped for the day, Altman unwound in the living room of his bungalow with a Scotch and soda. The burden of working under pressure on a scale that went against his grain showed in his face. "I just don't like to work this long or expensively," he said. "It's just very, very hard and slow." Also, relinquishing his normal role as producer meant losing "a little bit of credence with those people who depend on me. Because I've always had control, I could always solve grievances and show a certain amount of fairness."

Altman turned to his critics. He is fully aware of the hostile critical climate that currently surrounds him, and he seems resigned to it. But he was saddened, he said, to find talented actors stigmatized for being in a "disappointing" Altman film. "I have a couple of small pictures in mind I'd like to do that normally I'd have no trouble doing, with unknown people. But they're going to be hard to do now, thanks to the critics." He added, "I'm incapable of giving them what they want me to give them. I'm talking about the critics—and also the public, possibly." He disclosed that he had once wanted to make a film about James Watson and F.H.C. Crick, the scientists who discovered the structure of DNA.

"The only thing we're doing in *Popeye*," Altman said, "is showing a microcosm of an oppressed society. The whole key to *Popeye* is Segar's 'I yam what I yam.' These people are not what they are. They are what people tell them to be. They have never seen the man who is their dictator. That's the way most people are in dictatorships or most societies—capitalist or Communist or whatever. We behave out of fear of something we don't even know is going to happen. And we all try to be something else."

Feiffer, told about Altman's statement, laughed heartily. Altman's imagination, he said, was overripe about such matters. But for Altman *Popeye* is clearly an important movie. It has given him the chance to rebound commercially, and it may also give him the momentum for more serious work. After all, *Popeye*, Paul Dooley says, "is not a weird movie about strange people doing strange things, but essentially a nice movie with Altman's colors in it." ■

## FESTIVAL REPORT

from page 17

length portrait of a North Country gamekeeper's daily and seasonal rounds, from shooting poachers off the land to loading His Lordship's grousing guns, has the compassionate objectivity and thumbnail detail of a modern Defoe.

Also caught in the cinema-television border country is Scottish director John Mackenzie's new film, *The Long Good Friday*. Owing to a producers' wrangle, no one yet knows if this barnstorming melodrama will end up on the big screen or the small. And, indeed, a retroactive schizophrenia seems to have hit the movie. Half the time, it comes on like a late-night cops-and-robbers hokum shown on the tube; the other half, it boasts a flailing wit and vigor that deserve to be writ large on a movie screen. Eddie Constantine glooms magnetically as an American mafioso, Helen Mirren is the female interest, and Bob Hoskins burns up the screen as the (anti-) hero, a cockney tycoon lording over an empire of corruption and turning out sumptuously uncouth one-liners.

What *The Long Good Friday* doesn't solve is British cinema's nagging problem of finding its own ethnic and cultural identity. A filmy haze of parochialism surrounds Mackenzie's film, with its Little England version of a U.S. crime thriller, and the same goes for Franco Rosso's *Babylon*. Rosso's picture of West Indian immigrants battling to assert their Rastafarian culture and music in eighties London, amid community bigotry and police harassment, reeks of provincialism: not just because its story is like an Anglicized *Rockers*, but because the feisty black slang fizzles out in the damp, vernacularless English air.

Whenever the festival looked too much as if it was sagging into the sloughs of provincialism, however, Lynda Myles sagely hoisted it up with a gala preview of a new international "biggie." This year's major British premieres included Walter Hill's *The Long Riders*, Stuart Rosenberg's *Brubaker*, and Roman Polanski's *Tess*. Also raising the high-polish quotient was the Joseph H. Lewis retrospective. All right, so the choice of Lewis for an Edinburgh special tribute—after earlier ones to Douglas Sirk, Raoul Walsh, and Jacques Tourneur—sometimes looked like scraping the auteur barrel. But at least there is a daft stylishness about Lew-

is's movies that rinsed the eyes out after long hours of sociological or semiological solemnity.

Complementing the riotous geometry and shadow play of Lewis's best films—like *Undercover Man* and *The Big Combo*—was a little pastiche film noir made by a Glasgow-born student of Britain's National Film School. Sandy Johnson's *Never Say Die* is a chunk of underworld derring-do set in forties Glaswegian gangland. The images may be secondhand, but they're miraculously well observed—from queasy *Vertigo* stairwells to Fritz Lang *cassoulets* of ominous shadow. The craftsmanship is all there. When Johnson finds his own style, there'll be no stopping him.

From Europe and points east, three new films claimed attention. Jacques Bral's *Exterieur Nuit* is a marvelously gloomy odyssey: a tenebrous trawl through low-life Paris interweaving the lives of two young men, both indolent and jobless, and a spiky, macho, taxi-driving woman with whom one of them has a romance. The reversal of sexual stereotypes—the men are passive, the woman virulently active (she even beats up and robs her own customers!)—is only one of the film's surprises. Bral follows his characters through a Stygian cityscape in which time doesn't so much stand still as spread out in all directions, creating a brooding, dark infinity.

From Poland came Krzysztof Zanussi's *Constans* (*Constancy*). Though well to the fore among Polish artists currently belaboring their nation's status quo, Zanussi has never been one to take a pickax to the bulwark of social oppression. Instead, he chips away with a surgeon's scalpel, locating the weak spots before he makes his first incision. *Constans* is typical of his mazelike morality dramas: with a complex, twining vision of his country's hypocrisies and a hero whose professional skills link him to the corrupt Polish establishment even while his heart and conscience cry out in protest. It's a strong, cutting, immaculately argued film.

Lastly, Edinburgh's devotion to the undersung glories of Hong Kong cinema ushered in yet another Far Eastern sleeper, Ann Hui's *The Secret*. This explosive murder thriller, centered on a brutal killing in a park, is like an Orientalized Nicolas Roeg movie. Time, place, and camerawork are in perpetual swooping, darting flux. And though the film's last few minutes derail into absurdity, the preceding mayhem and momentum are terrific. ■

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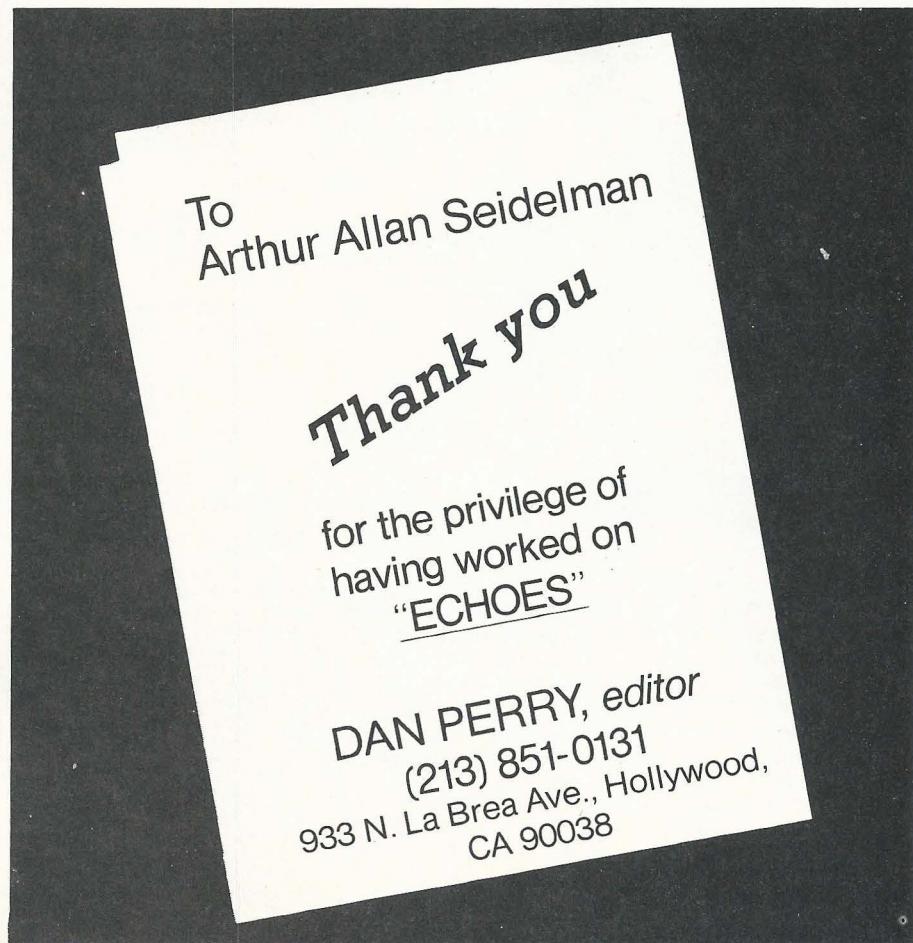


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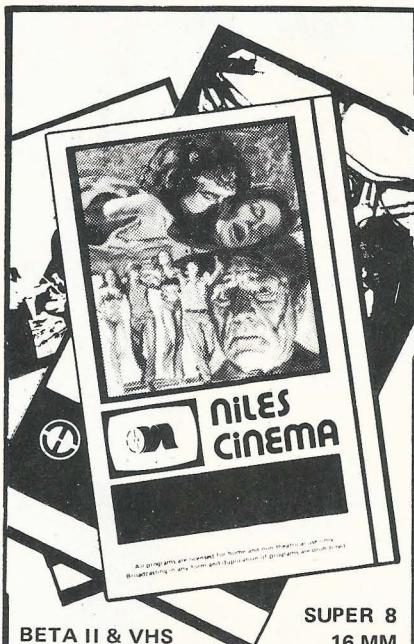
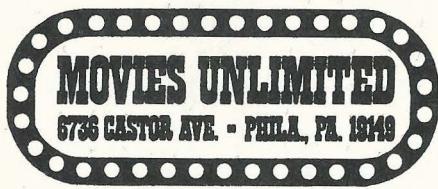
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(signed) Tod Herbers  
Publisher

# AFI NEWS

A newsletter about film and television activities of special interest to the American Film Institute members.

**SCREEN EDUCATION TRENDS:** Despite continued student interest in the media, many schools are finding the expense of screen education difficult to accommodate in their budgets, according to information published in the new edition of the *AFI Guide to College Courses in Film and Television*. The *Guide*, published every two years by the Institute's Education Services program, contains information and statistics on nearly every U.S. school offering courses in film and television.

Figures indicate that although the number of students majoring in media has increased by almost 20 percent, the number of schools with media programs has remained virtually unchanged since 1978. Faculty members, too, testify to a heightened cost consciousness in academia, according to Dr. Peter Bukalski, Director of Education Services. The number of part-time teachers in screen education has increased over the last two years, while the number of full-time teachers appears to be declining, a trend, Bukalski notes, that reflects a broad national movement in all academic disciplines. "There's hardly a field that hasn't felt the money pinch," says Bukalski. "In screen education, the increasing cost of film rentals and production materials are significant factors in the reduction of film and television programs."

Other noteworthy statistics in the new *Guide* reveal that although there are almost twice as many television majors as film majors, there are fewer television courses being taught than film courses. Also, the number of academic degrees being awarded in film and television has risen significantly, especially at the graduate level.

**WASHINGTON PREMIERE OF ALGER HISS FILM:** The Washington premiere of *The Trials of Alger Hiss*, a critically acclaimed documentary by independent filmmaker John Lowenthal that examines the circumstances surrounding the controversial Cold War espionage and perjury trial, will be held December 4 at the AFI Theater in Washington, D.C. Both Hiss, who recently went back to court with a petition to set aside his 1950 conviction, and Lowenthal, a lawyer and teacher at Rutgers University for 13 years before making this film, will be present at the AFI benefit screening. The documentary, which combines newsreel footage, present-day interviews with people involved in the case, and new evidence obtained under the 1976 Freedom of Information Act, presents the Hiss prosecution in the historical context of the Depression, the New Deal, World War II, and the Cold War. The film marks the inauguration of the "Independent Showcase" at the AFI Theater. Coordinated by the Institute's Exhibition Services, the "Showcase" will eventually become the basis of a touring program of independent films.

**NEW CYCLE OF DIRECTING WORKSHOP FOR WOMEN UNDER WAY:** The dozen women chosen to participate in the fourth cycle of the AFI Directing Workshop for Women met last month in Los Angeles to begin the 18-month program. The workshop was designed to provide qualified women from different areas of film and television with an opportunity to direct. The fourth cycle of the DWW was funded by the Ford Foundation, which has also underwritten a fifth workshop to begin in the spring of 1982. The twelve participants, selected from a field of some 220 applicants, are: Candace Allen, Rae Allen, Christine Choy, Naomi Foner, Lissa Fruchtmann, Victoria Hochberg, Tamar Hoff, Nancy Malone, Maria E. Munoz, Miriam Nelson, Mary Kay Place, and Marice Tobias.

**FILM PRESERVATION GRANTS:** Eight organizations have received grants totaling \$487,500 from the AFI/Arts Endowment Film Archival Program in support of film preservation projects. The program, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and administered by the Institute, is an outgrowth of the AFI-coordinated effort to acquire and preserve a broad cross section of the American film heritage. The organizations funded this year include the Anthology Film Archives, the Astoria Motion Picture and Television Center Foundation, the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, the Iowa State University, the Museum of Modern Art, the New York Public Library, the Oregon Historical Society, and the UCLA Film Archives.



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16 mm, 8 mm, video features-shorts-monthly lists. Filmbrokers, 3675 Torrance Blvd., Torrance, CA 90503.

Celebrity tape liquidation sale. Contact: Sandra Shevey, 2043 N. Beachwood, Dr., L.A. CA 90068, (213) 465-6741.

Free list. 16 mm films, video. Send S.A.S.E. James Brown, Rt. 1, Box 186, Bentonville, AR 72712.

16 mm TV commercials, pre-1971. Box 2411, V.H., M.A. 02568.

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Old movie magazines, posters: catalog, \$1. M. Summers, Orlean, VA 22128.

Harp Beyond The Wall, Compelling Texas novel, Loyce Adams Paperback, \$3.95. Crescent Publications, 5410 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 400, L.A., CA 90036.

Pratfall—The Magazine of Laurel and Hardy. 4 issues—\$6. Back issues available. Box 8341A, Universal City, CA 91608.

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# Periodicals

## Plan for the Future

The sequel to *The Empire Strikes Back* is still in the planning stages, but George Lucas's special effects team is already hard at work, according to a progress report in *Millimeter's* special effects issue. Dennis Muren, director of effects photography at Industrial Light and Magic (part of Lucasfilm), says the film will feature an extension of the technology used in *Empire*. "We're combining the flexibility of stop-motion with the realism of motion control technology," he explains. "It's the next generation." Shooting on the film, though, is not scheduled to start until next August.

"Tracing Special Effects Trends With Dennis Muren" by Susan Turner. *Millimeter*, September 1980.

## Shock Treatment

Horror films are a genre that simply will not die, no matter how many critics drive stakes into their hearts. To learn the tricks of scaring audiences, *Filmmakers Monthly* talks with the creators of three recent films—Joe Dante (*The Howling*), Kevin Connor (*Motel Hell*), and Brian De Palma (*Dressed To Kill*). To put it all into perspective, the magazine interviews veteran director Robert Wise. Wise may be best known for *West Side Story* and *The Sound of Music*, but he cut his film teeth back in the forties with producer Val Lewton on such films as *The Curse of the Cat People* and *The Body Snatcher*. At work on a horror film titled *Don't Stay Out Late*, Wise admits that he has had to "jazz it up" in light of the new explicitness in horror films: "We'll have to shock the audience earlier in the story or I don't think we'll be able to get this off the ground."

"The Techniques of the Horror Film" by Ralph Appelbaum. *Filmmakers Monthly*, September 1980.

## Blue Jeans Ads

Designer jeans have become big business, and heavy television advertising is one reason, according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*. With catchy jingles, companies like Jordache, Calvin Klein, and Gloria Vanderbilt have tried to stake out a portion of the market that is still dominated by Levi Strauss & Co., whose own clever animation ads haven't hurt its sales. But the new jeans makers, the article says, have run into some problems with nervous broadcasters over suggestive ads. In one, a woman wearing only jeans rode

a stallion down a beach, and in another, two ten-year-olds coyly flirted next to the jeans racks. The first ad was reshot with the woman wearing a shirt; the second was pulled after a few months.

"Some People Believe That Blue-Jeans Ads Are a Little Too Blue" by Gail Bronson and Jeffrey H. Birnbaum. *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 October 1980.

## Eclectic Collection

The latest issue of the *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* is devoted to the library's Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division. Included is an article on pioneer cameraman Arthur H. C. Sintzenich by division chief Erik Barnouw and a survey of the library's television program holdings by Arlene Balkansky. David L. Parker and Paul C. Spehr offer historical perspectives on opera stars who attempted film careers and on the "prehistoric" days of filmmaking (that is, before trade-press coverage). And, in the ecumenical spirit of the library's newest division, Jon Newson contributes a discussion of the technical and aesthetic aspects of music composed for animated films, complete with a bound-in plastic record of examples.

*The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, Summer/Fall 1980.

## Dearth for the Salesman

The selling of television advertising time is serious business, but these days network salesmen are glummer than usual. According to *Fortune*, the faltering economy is causing advertisers to pull back on their orders for expensive prime-time spots and to switch to less expensive daytime ones, or even radio or print. In addition, Nielsen data show the networks losing viewers to cable and pay television. Even those viewers who tape programs off the air, *Fortune* reports, aren't helping the situation: Sixty percent of them edit out the commercials.

"Tougher Times for TV's Time Sellers" by Geoffrey Colvin. *Fortune*, 20 October 1980.

## One Toe Over the Line

Has "60 Minutes," America's top-rated investigative series, become too aggressive in its zeal to uncover fraud, corruption, and malfeasance? That's the question Paul Good raises in *Panorama* as he takes on producer Don Hewitt, Mike Wallace, and the rest of the show's team.

Good faults the show's insistence on a black-or-white morality in which diet doctors, power companies, and police departments are portrayed as villains. "Neither life nor journalism is a matter of white hats or black hats," Good says. "Mostly it is gray hats, and how they look varies with the person describing them." Hewitt admits that the show's striving to "make reality competitive with make-believe" has tipped it toward a kind of entertainment. "Of course," Hewitt contends, "there is a line separating show biz from news biz. You walk up to that line, touch it with your toe, and do not cross it."

"Why You Can't Always Trust '60 Minutes' Reporting" by Paul Good. *Panorama*, September 1980.

## Films Without a Home

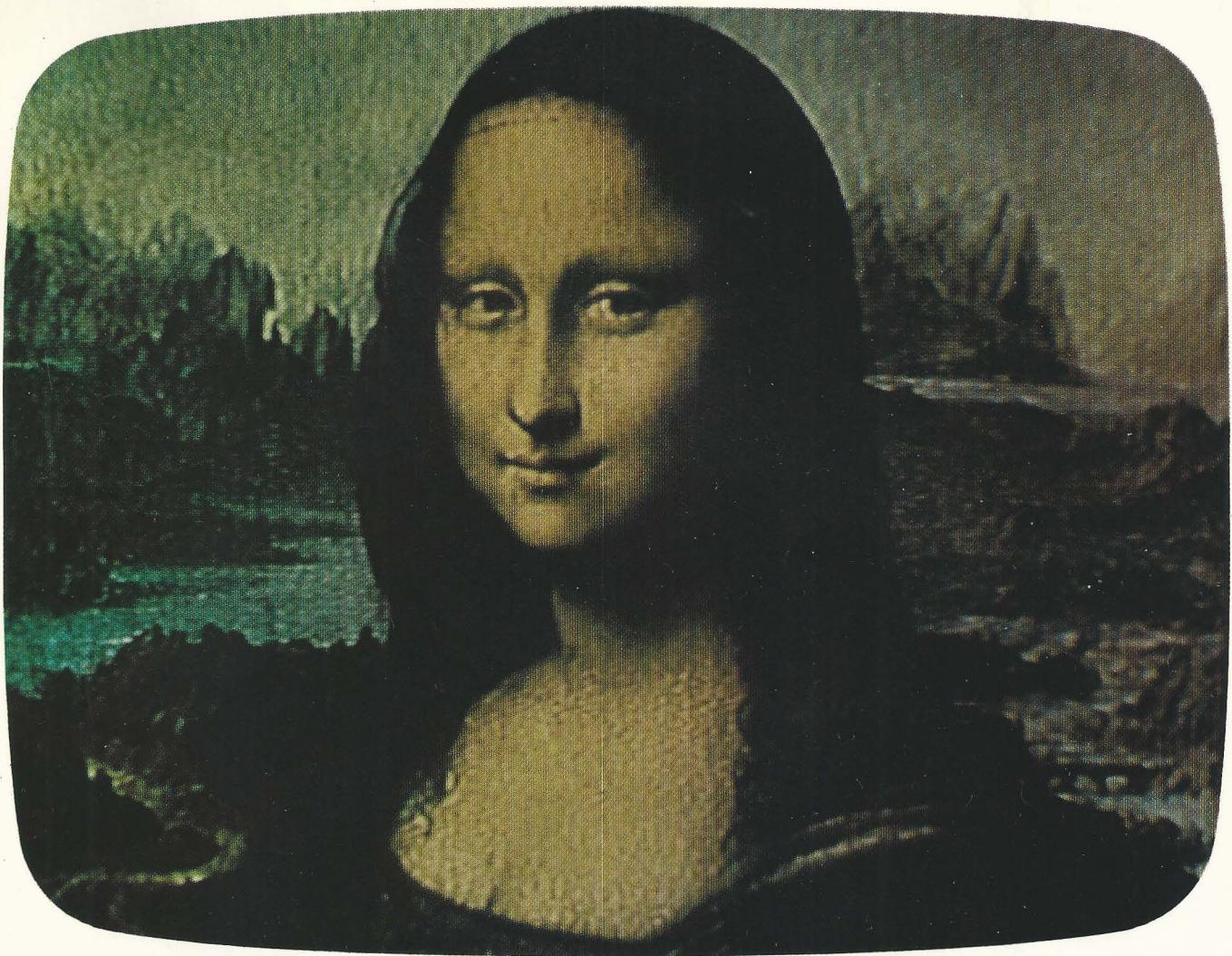
Stephen Farber in *New West* explores why many films get shot, get written about, but then never get released. Recent ones include Hal Ashby's *Second-Hand Hearts* and Robert Altman's *Health*. According to Farber, such films are often difficult to pigeonhole, and if the studios can't decide how to advertise a film, it is often cheaper to shelve it. But two films that made it off the shelf this year—*The Stunt Man* and *The Great Santini*—opened to excellent reviews. Farber's solution calls for a creative distribution system that would handle a broad range of movies. The studios are said to be considering such a plan.

"Back From the Twilight Zone" by Stephen Farber. *New West*, 20 October 1980.

## That's Entertainment

The *Videophile*, celebrating its fourth anniversary, looks back at the fifties television series "The Amos 'n' Andy Show." The article includes a short history of the show—it began on the radio in 1926—a list of the seventy-eight titles, and an interview with Ernestine Wade, who played Sapphire, and Alvin Childress, the famous Amos. "Amos 'n' Andy" was withdrawn from syndication in the sixties after black groups accused the show of racial stereotyping. But Wade, now in her seventies, still disputes the charge. "When I hear people talk about our show being stereotyped," she says, "I have always said this: None of these shows are documentaries. They are strictly for entertainment."

"Looking Back: 'The Amos 'n' Andy Show.'" *The Videophile*, October 1980.



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